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Ortega accused of crimes against humanity

An expert panel appointed by the United Nations (UN) has concluded that the Nicaraguan government led by President Daniel Ortega has committed “widespread human rights violations that amount to crimes against humanity”. The panel was set up to investigate alleged human rights violations in Nicaragua since 2018, when the government began cracking down on opponents in response to social unrest – repression which intensified after discredited general elections in November 2021. Other institutions have similarly concluded that such crimes – which are subject to the principle of universal jurisdiction – were committed by Ortega and other top officials. The UN expert panel’s findings have been welcomed by local and international rights groups, which have seized on its calls for the international community to initiate legal action against those responsible.

Set up in May 2022, in line with a March 2022 resolution adopted by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the three-member panel of human rights experts on Nicaragua (GHREN) issued its report on 2 March for the HRC’s 52nd session taking place from 27 February to 4 April. It was unequivocal that the alleged abuses “include extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, torture, arbitrary deprivation of nationality and of the right to remain in one’s own country [which are] not an isolated phenomenon but the product of the deliberate dismantling of democratic institutions and destruction of civic and democratic space”.

Warning that “these violations continue to be committed today”, GHREN chair, Germany’s Jan-Michael Simon, said “the scale you’re looking at in terms of executions...is more than 100; if it comes to torture, we would come to several hundred [or] even more, and if it comes to arbitrary detentions, this goes well beyond this number...Given the other violations under political persecution, [it comes to] several thousand.” The report also highlights the closure of at least 3,144 civil society groups since December 2018, noting that “virtually all independent media and human rights organisations operate from abroad”. It warns that the situation is worsening, citing the recent expulsion of 222 opponents dubbed “traitors” by the government, who were then stripped of their nationality – a measure since applied to a further 94 dissidents [[WR-23-07](#)].

A *New York Times* (NYT) article published on 2 March cited Simon as comparing Nicaragua’s track record on human rights to Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler, saying the current government’s tactics to hold on to power beginning in 2018 were like those seen during the Nuremberg trials. “The weaponising of the justice system against political opponents in the way that is done in Nicaragua is exactly what the Nazi regime did,” he said. The NYT also points out that under universal jurisdiction any country’s courts can try people for atrocities committed anywhere. Yet while the GHREN recommends exercising this principle, it notes that it applied the “reasonable grounds to believe” standard of proof. It admits that this threshold is “lower

Ortega's response

The GHREN report notes that between June and December 2022, it sent 11 letters to the Nicaraguan authorities. However, it received no response. On 6 March the HRC concluded an interactive dialogue with the GHREN which cited the Nicaraguan government as wishing to “formally indicate that it had not nor would it ever accept the unilateral appointment of the Members of the Group of Experts in any way, shape or form”, describing it as “nothing less than a smokescreen in order to allow fabrication of facts”. A 6 March statement by US-based NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) notes that no international human rights monitor has been allowed to visit the country since the government expelled staff members of the IACHR and UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in late 2018.

than that required to establish liability in a criminal proceeding”, although is clear that it is “sufficient to justify further investigation”.

The GHREN is not the first international panel to reach this conclusion. In December 2018, an Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI), appointed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), presented a report into the violence which erupted between 18 April and 30 May 2018, citing 109 violent deaths over that period, and finding that the “State of Nicaragua perpetrated actions that amount to crimes against humanity, according to international law, namely murders, arbitrary deprivation of liberty and persecution”. An IACHR-endorsed report released in November 2021 by 15 Nicaraguan human rights organisations, including Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos (Cenidh) and Colectivo de Derechos Humanos Nicaragua Nunca Más, accused President Ortega of these crimes. The report was the first to include the period up to and including the November 2021 election and tallied at least 355 dead and some 2,000 injured by state agents or civilians acting in acquiescence with these forces, since 2018.

According to the GHREN report, the Ortega government officially recognises 198 deaths between 19 April and 13 September 2018 in the context of the protests. The GHREN report notes that it attributes responsibility to the people who participated in the protests, which it characterises as an “attempted coup”.

Cosep shuttered

Indicative of the government's continued crackdown on civil society, on 6 March Nicaragua's influential umbrella business group, Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada (Cosep), was stripped of its legal status. The authorities cited bureaucratic issues and a failure to complete the registration validation process as the grounds for its decision, which also affects another 18 private sector groups, including the national chamber of mining (Caminic) and national chamber of microfinance (Asomif).

Cosep and the government previously had an amicable relationship, due to President Ortega's business-friendly policies and pragmatic economic management. However, this unravelled following the April 2018 crackdown, and Cosep leaders have since featured among those targeted by the government. Its two most recent presidents, José Adán Aguerri and Michael Healy, were among the 222 political prisoners recently expelled to the US. Both aligned with opposition grouping Alianza Cívica por la Justicia y la Democracia (ACJD), they were detained in 2021, and convicted last year of money laundering and treason – charges widely considered trumped up and invoked against other political prisoners.

Amid condemnation by private sector groups in Central America like sub-regional organisation Federación de Entidades Privadas de Centroamérica, Panamá y República Dominicana (Fedepri), critics like Félix Maradiaga, a former presidential pre-candidate who was recently expelled, warned that with Cosep's closure Ortega is “isolating the country even more from investment which could generate jobs and opportunities”.

US Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols also tweeted that the move “further weakens the...fragile business environment” in the country, which has faced significant international sanctions over the worsening human rights and democracy situation – not least those imposed in October by the US targeting the gold sector [\[WR-22-45\]](#).

Concerns about the impact of Cosep's closure on Nicaragua's business climate come as a report released in January by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) already highlighted that “business climate deterioration and stricter international sanctions pose elevated risks to trade and financing flows”. That report estimated that Nicaragua's GDP grew by 4% in 2022, which it expects to moderate to 3% this year.

Lasso's weakness exposed as impeachment grows more likely

Ecuador's President Guillermo Lasso is staring down the barrel of a second impeachment trial, in which the odds would be stacked heavily against him. On 4 March the national assembly overwhelmingly voted to approve a report recommending the launch of impeachment proceedings due to Lasso's alleged failure to prevent corruption in his government. With an impeachment motion likely to be submitted imminently, his best hopes for political survival lie with either the constitutional court or a constitutional mechanism known as the 'muerte cruzada', which would enable him to dissolve the legislature and convene snap general elections.

With 104 votes in favour, 18 against, and three abstentions, legislators voted to approve a report by a congressional commission accusing President Lasso of failures in his response to allegedly widespread government corruption. Specifically, it accused him of obstructing corruption investigations and installing allies as directors of state companies who were subsequently accused of embezzlement. The report's authors argued that these alleged offences justify Lasso's impeachment based on constitutional articles allowing the removal of presidents for "crimes against the security of the state" and "crimes of extortion, bribery, embezzlement, or illicit enrichment".

The vote to approve the report underlined the near-total disintegration of Lasso's weak legislative alliance. The centre-left Izquierda Democrática (ID), a fair-weather ally that propped up the government in the last impeachment vote in June 2022 [[WR-22-26](#)], voted by 13-3 to approve the report. The conservative Partido Social Cristiano (PSC), which also supported Lasso in the previous impeachment attempt, likewise voted overwhelmingly to approve the report. As expected, the indigenous Pachakutik, an estranged government ally, and the main opposition force, the left-wing Unión por la Esperanza (Unes) coalition, also voted almost unanimously in favour, leaving Lasso with just a handful of votes from his centre-right Movimiento Creo (MC) and a cluster of small parties and independents.

The odds are now clearly stacked against the government if the opposition successfully launches impeachment proceedings. Removing Lasso from office would require the support of 92 legislators – 12 fewer than the number who approved the report recommending impeachment. With Unes reportedly already preparing an impeachment motion, the government will be considering its options. The best-case scenario for Lasso would be for the constitutional court to reject an impeachment attempt before it can proceed to a political trial. The court's approval for the impeachment attempt is mandatory, and the opposition may struggle to convince it that Lasso is guilty of corruption or threatening state security 'by omission'. Heading off the impeachment attempt in the courtroom presents by far the best chance for Lasso to remain in office.

Alternatively, Lasso may be considering invoking the 'muerte cruzada' – a constitutional tool enabling the president to convene a snap general election in the event of "severe political crisis and domestic unrest". This would be an enormously risky move for Lasso, whose popularity has plummeted since he took office in May 2021. The threat of early elections will nevertheless rattle some nerves in the national assembly, potentially persuading some legislators to drop their support for impeachment proceedings.

OAS concerns

On 5 March the general secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS) issued a statement on the political situation in Ecuador, underlining "the absolute importance of adherence to democratic institutions and respect for the stability of constitutional periods". It called on political actors in Ecuador to resolve their differences "within the constitutional context".

Petro's son under scrutiny over drug links

Clan del Golfo behind mining protests?

The governor of Antioquia department, Aníbal Gaviria, claimed on 7 March that the Clan del Golfo drug trafficking organisation (DTO) is responsible for highly disruptive protests by informal miners in the Bajo Cauca region. Since 1 March, informal miners have blocked roads and declared a curfew which has been enforced with the threat of violence. As a result, Gaviria claimed that 250,000 people have been confined to their homes. Among other things, the miners are demanding new legislation to formalise artisanal mining and for a halt to the authorities' destruction of equipment used for illegal mining. Gaviria claimed that the protests, which recall the Clan del Golfo's 'armed strike' in May 2022, are being orchestrated by the DTO in retaliation for a crackdown on its illegal mining operations.

Colombia's President Gustavo Petro is facing his first real crisis since taking office in August last year, as questions mount regarding the financing of his election campaign. Petro's son, Nicolás, is at the centre of the accusations, having been accused by his ex-wife of receiving money from "murky" sources, including a convicted drug trafficker. Petro issued a statement on 2 March supporting an investigation into both his son and his brother, Juan Fernando, whose meetings with jailed politicians during the election campaign were never fully explained [[WR-22-16](#)].

Nicolás Petro, a deputy for the left-wing Pacto Histórico coalition in the departmental assembly of Atlántico, has been at the centre of a political storm since the news magazine *Semana* published an interview on 2 March with his ex-wife, Days Vázquez. Vázquez accused her former husband of "receiving money from people with a murky past", claiming that Nicolás had received over Col\$600m (US\$124,600) from Santander Lopesierra ('El Hombre Marlboro'), a convicted drug trafficker who spent 18 years in prison in the US, and Col\$400m from Alfonso del Cristo Hilsaca ('El Turco'), a business magnate who has previously been accused of holding links to paramilitary groups operating along the Caribbean coast.

Vásquez claimed that President Petro was unaware of his son's alleged meetings with these men, and that Nicolás had kept Lopesierra's donation for himself. She claimed that Nicolás' connection to Lopesierra was through the drug trafficker's daughter. Nicolás released a statement denying any relationship with either Lopesierra or Hilsaca, saying that "I haven't met with, nor have I received any type of political, personal, or economic favour from any questionable people". He said that the allegations were aimed at "destroying me as a person".

However, the latest claims came after Colombia's national electoral council (CNE) announced on 28 February that it had opened a preliminary investigation into the financing of the Petro campaign. The CNE said it had received a tip-off that some cash donations were not properly declared, and that the Pacto Histórico coalition represented by Petro "has not presented reports and supporting documents to this auditing body in a timely and clear way, failing to comply with the law". According to local media, the CNE has expanded its investigation following Vásquez's claims.

Petro moved quickly to get ahead of her allegations, releasing a statement saying that "due to the rumours in public opinion surrounding my brother Juan Fernando Petro Urrego and my eldest son Nicolás Petro Burgos, I ask the attorney general's office to carry out all necessary investigations and determine possible responsibilities". The reference to his brother reflected continued speculation regarding Juan Fernando's visits during the election campaign to Bogotá's La Picota prison, where he reportedly met former politicians jailed for corruption and for their ties to paramilitary groups. At the time, Petro claimed that his brother was sounding out the possibilities for a new policy of "social forgiveness", although no further mention has been made of this policy since Petro took office.

The scandal looks unlikely to fade away, with Nicolás Petro's alleged association with Lopesierra provoking condemnation even from staunch allies such as Senators Gustavo Bolívar and Iván Cepeda, both from Pacto Histórico. It could hardly have come at a worse time, as Petro attempts to bring already sceptical legislators on board with his controversial health reform [[WR-23-07](#)].

Government to help – or hinder – opposition primaries

Opposition parties are gearing up their campaigns for presidential primaries due on 22 October. But a fair election process will require some government input, and it is far from clear if that will be forthcoming.

One prominent opposition leader, former interim president Juan Guaidó, of the Voluntad Popular (VP) party, indicated on 7 March that he will stand in the primaries ahead of the 2024 general elections. Henrique Capriles Radonski, who stood unsuccessfully as opposition presidential candidate in 2012 and 2018 for Primero Justicia (PJ), has also thrown his hat in the ring, as has the more radical opposition leader María Corina Machado of Vente Venezuela. More are likely to follow. PJ has announced it will be holding nationwide public consultations on a future programme of government.

While the parties are throwing themselves with relish into campaigning, a critical question is whether the government will help or hinder the primaries. First, candidates like Guaidó and Capriles are subject to government-backed court rulings banning them from holding elective office for 15 years, alleging a series of administrative violations. The opposition assumption is that these bans will eventually be lifted as part of the slow moving, Mexico-based government-opposition dialogue on a political settlement. There is also a hope that these and various other restrictions will be dropped as a quid pro quo after the recent relaxation of US oil sanctions. But this is uncertain, and serious doubts remain over whether the government led by President Nicolás Maduro is really disposed to allow free and fair elections. A tactic used by the government in the past could also be repeated – getting biddable courts to seize control of certain political parties or to remove their legal rights to slogans and symbols.

The opposition's organising committee, the Comisión Nacional de Primaria (CNP), is looking for technical support from the government-controlled national electoral commission (CNE). CNE help would be needed, for example, to gain access to polling stations and other electoral infrastructure. It would also be needed if there is to be some form of overseas or postal voting. It is estimated that over 7m Venezuelans have left the country.

The electoral register was last updated in 2022, and totalled 21.09m citizens, of whom 107,000 were overseas. The real proportion of voters outside Venezuela is believed to be much higher than those figures suggest and is estimated by some to be one in five – who if they register would represent an important block of voters likely to sympathise with the opposition cause. The question is whether the CNE will be inclined to help register and manage them.

Ten Years after Chávez

The Maduro government marked the tenth anniversary of the death of former president Hugo Chávez, who held power from 1999 until his death from cancer on 5 March 2013, with speeches calling for revolutionary unity and ceremonies attended by, among others, leftist leaders including Bolivia's President Luis Arce and former president Evo Morales (2006-2019), Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega, Ecuador's former president Rafael Correa (2007-2017), Honduras's former president Manuel Zelaya (2006-2009), and Cuba's former president Raúl Castro (2006-2018). Maduro spoke of the need to maintain "political ideological and moral unity" so as to defeat "divisionist forces".

Political analysts note that Chávez remains highly popular despite being dead. According to a recent poll by Datanálisis, 53% of respondents have a "positive valuation" of Chávez, compared with only 22% for Maduro, his successor (*see sidebar*).

Chávez

Luis Vicente León, the executive director of Datanálisis, said the high support for Hugo Chávez in the polling company's most recent survey could be because, like Hollywood movie stars Marilyn Monroe and James Dean, Chávez died at the peak of his popularity and has now become a kind of 'frozen' icon. In the popular imagination Chávez does not seem to be associated with the subsequent collapse of the Venezuelan economy, although León says it was implicit in his economic model based on short-term use of oil revenues, expropriations, populism, and unfunded public spending.

Diamonds are forever

Facing a plethora of potential criminal and civil suits back home, Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2023) remains in self-imposed exile in the US state of Florida. He was reportedly planning on coming home soon, but a new diamond-tinted scandal may keep him away for a little longer. The last week in Brazil has been dominated by media coverage of how his former administration dealt with two high value gifts of jewellery from the government of Saudi Arabia.

On 3 March, the national daily *O Estado de S Paulo* reported that jewellery worth an estimated R\$16.5m (US\$3.2m) was confiscated at Brazilian customs in October 2021 from a government aide who was returning from a work trip to Saudi Arabia. The diamond necklace, ring, earrings, and watch, from the Swiss luxury brand Chopard, were supposedly gifts from the Saudi government to then-First Lady Michelle Bolsonaro.

Items worth over US\$1,000 must be declared to Brazilian customs and incur a 50% import tax. The jewels could have been let in tax-free as a gift to the Brazilian government, in which case they would have become state property. The jewels were seized because the aide, who worked in the ministry of mines & energy and allegedly had no knowledge of what the case contained, failed to declare them to customs at São Paulo's Guarulhos airport. A minister reportedly declined to register the jewels as a government gift.

Following *O Estadão's* initial report, it emerged that a second gift, also manufactured by Chopard, including a watch, cufflinks, and a rose gold pen, valued at some R\$400,000 (US\$77,000), appears to have been brought into the country from Saudi Arabia by an aide flying commercial without being declared and without customs' knowledge. This one was held in the ministry of mines and energy and was not handed over to the Planalto presidential palace until 29 December – the last day of the Bolsonaro presidency.

On 8 March, Bolsonaro confirmed to *CNN Brasil* that this second case was in his possession, while assuring that he had kept the gift in line with the law. "There was no illegality. I followed the law, as I always have," he told a *CNN* reporter. Brazil's federal court of accounts, Tribunal de Contas da União (TCU), determines that a president can only keep gifts of an extremely personal nature or for personal consumption.

Bolsonaro had days earlier rejected any wrongdoing in relation to the jewellery seized by customs. "I'm being accused for a present I didn't request and didn't receive," he said. Michelle Bolsonaro also pleaded ignorance of the jewellery's existence.

Yet the Bolsonaro government made at least eight unsuccessful attempts to get the jewellery released from customs into its custody, *O Estadão* reported, through different channels, including the mines & energy ministry and a last-ditch attempt by Bolsonaro himself on 28 December 2022, days before he left Brazil for the US. Various former and current officials appear to be implicated. CCTV video has been discovered of the then mines and energy minister Bento Albuquerque telling customs officers that the jewellery was intended for Michelle Bolsonaro.

Probes

There are now two investigations into the way the gifts were handled, led by customs and by the federal police. At first sight officials in the former government are potentially guilty of failing to declare the gifts on entry and of failing to pay the relevant import taxes. They may also be guilty of seeking to describe the gifts incorrectly as the personal property of the former president and his first lady, Michelle Bolsonaro, rather than the property of the Brazilian state.

A royal call

One of the latest foreign dignitaries to speak with President Lula was the UK's King Charles III, who held a phone call with the Brazilian president on 6 March. The presidential office subsequently confirmed to the local press that President Lula has been invited to King Charles' coronation in May but did not say whether he planned to attend or not.

The suspicion therefore is not only that Bolsonaro wanted to keep valuable state gifts as his own, but also that he used the state apparatus for personal gain (although in this case, not entirely successfully as he was unable to recover the confiscated jewels). A federal police (PF) investigation has been launched into the irregular handling of the first set of jewellery.

Meanwhile, a deputy prosecutor has requested that the TCU investigate the inappropriate use of the state machine in the case. According to daily *O Globo*, the petition cites the "true extravagance" of the case and the fact that Bolsonaro won election in 2018 on a platform "defending austerity and public transparency".

The whole incident has seemingly upset Bolsonaro's stated plan to return to Brazil imminently. On 7 March, the former president's eldest son, Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, posted, but then deleted, a social media message saying that his father would return to the country on 15 March.

Flávio Bolsonaro later said that the date of his father's return to Brazil was "likely but still unconfirmed", with no precise schedule drawn up as yet. Flávio then told radio station *Jovem Pan News* that the allegations surrounding the diamonds would not delay his father's return.

Bolsonaro has given indications recently that he still sees a future for himself in public life in Brazil. The scandal may also affect very early attempts to present Michelle Bolsonaro as a potential presidential candidate for the right in 2026. Michelle Bolsonaro, who is already back in the country, is being introduced into politics through her husband's Partido Liberal (PL).

But the jewellery scandal appears to be creating setbacks for both Michelle Bolsonaro and her husband. It also adds to the stack of investigations that the former president currently faces, including a plethora of electoral probes that could make him ineligible for holding public office, in addition to an investigation into his possible responsibility in stoking the 8 January riots [[WR-23-03](#)]. He could face the threat of preventative detention when he sets foot again in Brazil.

Luxury taste

As president, Bolsonaro cultivated his image as a 'man of the people', often photographed eating Brazilian staples in simple joints and rarely seen in formal dress. The populist leader did, however, appear to have a taste for the high life, beyond these latest revelations around his and his wife's affinity for diamonds. His presidential spending records, released by the government led by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva earlier this year, show the corporate card being used for hotel stays and expensive meals.

Nearly 20,000 illegal miners evicted

A senate commission said on 8 March that 19,000 illegal miners had left the Yanomani indigenous reserves, leaving a smaller group of around 800 still in place. The government has been seeking to evict the miners amid a humanitarian crisis as the indigenous community suffers from communicable diseases and mercury poisoning of local rivers.

According to Senator Chico Rodrigues, who leads the Temporary Commission on the State of the Yanomani, the indigenous reserve could be free of all illegal miners by the end of March.

Disease and food shortages among the Yanomani community were discovered in January, prompting the newly installed government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to declare a humanitarian crisis and send in emergency supplies and medical staff.

Lula unmoved by corruption allegations

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva held a meeting with his communications minister, Juscelino Filho, on 6 March. Lula summoned Filho to the meeting after allegations of corruption reported in the national daily *O Estado de S Paulo* four days earlier, insisting that he would be dismissed if he failed to give a satisfactory explanation. Filho remained in his post after the meeting.

According to *O Estado de S Paulo*, the multiple allegations of corruption against Filho include neglecting to declare ownership of thoroughbred racehorses to the Tribunal Superior Eleitoral (TSE), the country's top electoral tribunal; using an air force aeroplane to fly to São Paulo at public expense for private business (attending a horse auction); using R\$5m (US\$960,000) of public money to pave roads leading to an estate owned by his family in the northern state of Maranhão; and falsifying helicopter passenger lists to justify expense claims.

President Lula said in an interview with *BandNews* that Filho would be given the opportunity to demonstrate his innocence. After the meeting with Lula, Filho said he had cleared up the “unfounded” accusations. Gleisi Hoffmann, the president of Lula's left-wing Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), which leads the governing coalition, had called for Filho to be dismissed to avoid harming the government's image, but Lula appears to have calculated that it would be equally damaging to lose a minister so early in his tenure, particularly given the impact on his coalition.

Filho was appointed as part of a congressional-level accord between his centre-right political party, União Brasil (União), and the government, giving the former a ‘quota’ of three ministerial positions. Among those who recommended him is the powerful president of the lower chamber of congress, Arthur Lira, of Progressistas (PP).

Filho is not the only minister under pressure. The tourism minister, Daniela Carneiro, has been accused of links to the Rio de Janeiro militias, vigilante groups run by off-duty police who are accused of illegal activities, including running protection rackets in parts of the city. Carneiro is also a member of União, but she was appointed directly by Lula outside the quota agreement with the party.

In his *BandNews* interview Lula minimised the charges, saying photographs of Carneiro together with militia members did not prove any wrongdoing. He added that he was very grateful for her support in last year's elections because she was the only local politician who had supported him in the Baixada Fluminense neighbourhood, at a great cost to her and her husband, since they were subject to a campaign of persecution and harassment.

Militias

The relationship between the tourism minister, Daniela Carneiro, and the militias goes beyond appearing together in some photographs, according to media reports. *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper said she was politically close to a former military police officer Juracy Prudencio (‘Jura’), sentenced for militia involvement, as well as to Marcio Pagniez (‘Marcinho Bombeiro’), who is currently in preventive detention awaiting trial.

ARGENTINA | POLITICS & SECURITY

Send in the army – really?

Violence has surged this year in Rosario, the capital of the north-eastern province of Santa Fe, and the third largest city in Argentina. Responding to a popular outcry President Alberto Fernández announced on 7 March that he was sending in extra federal forces, including an army unit. Opinions are divided, with some arguing that sending in the army is a major mistake.

Military role

In reaction to the Argentine army's involvement in mass disappearances and human rights violations during the 1970s and 1980s, current legislation says the military must focus on defence from external attack, not on domestic security. Some analysts also argue that the army lacks the specialised training and skills needed to tackle criminal cartels.

In recent weeks Rosario has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. A battle for territory between the Los Monos drug trafficking organisation and rival cartels has been in full swing, pushing up the number of homicides in the first two months of this year to 65, an increase of around 9% on last year's average.

Adding to media interest, in the early hours of 2 March shots were fired and a warning message was left at a supermarket targeting Rosario's most famous celebrity, football super star Lionel Messi. The message said "Messi, we are waiting for you, [Rosario mayor Pablo] Javkin is also a narco, he's not going to take care of you". The supermarket is owned by the family of Messi's wife, the Roccuzzos.

The day before the presidential announcement viewers of *Todo Noticias (TN)*, a sensationalist television news channel, were able to see live coverage of the funeral of a 12-year old boy who had been caught in crossfire, followed by local residents of a poor neighbourhood attacking and looting the home of one of his alleged killers.

Facing these developments and perhaps with the coming electoral campaign on his mind, President Fernández said he was sending additional federal police and gendarmes into the city, to raise their strength to 1,400. The army was also being sent in.

However, given sensitivities over army involvement in domestic security, Fernández said that he would be sending an unarmed company of army engineers whose job would be to improve roads and amenities in poor parts of the city. He likened this to the humanitarian role the army had played during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic (*see sidebar*).

Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, the mayor of the city of Buenos Aires and a potential presidential candidate for the centre-right opposition Juntos por el Cambio (JxC), had earlier criticised the idea of sending in the military, saying the gendarmes (militarised police) were better trained for the job in hand. But former security minister Patricia Bullrich, a right-of-centre rival for the presidential nomination, struck a more gung-ho style. "They took their time, but they recognised the problem," she said, referring to the Fernández administration. "In Rosario, federal forces and the army are needed to stop free circulation of narcos and paid killers. Building houses is not a priority, the priority is to avoid Rosario's citizens getting killed," she said.

CHILE | POLITICS

Constitutional fatigue setting in?

The second attempt in just over two years to launch major constitutional reform kicked off on 6 March, with the inauguration of a 24-strong committee of experts. This time, the process looks like being significantly more consensual and moderate, and possibly duller. Success is still far from guaranteed.

Chilean news portal *Ex-Ante* sought to highlight the contrast between two dates: 4 July 2021 and 6 March 2023. The former saw the nearly riotous inauguration of the elected, 155-strong constitutional convention. There were demonstrations and arguments inside and outside. Radical members of the convention refused to sing the national anthem.

This week, in contrast, there were only a few demonstrators outside. Inside the tone was much more austere, sober, and focused. The national anthem was played. Earlier the justice minister, Luis Cordero, commented "we are probably going to have a boring constitutional reform process, and if it does turn out that way, that could be a good thing".

Disillusionment

According to polling company Pulso Ciudadano, in February 57% of respondents said they had no or little confidence in the constitutional reform process, up by 2.3 percentage points on the previous month. Of the other respondents, 16.7% said they had a lot of confidence in the process, while 26.2% said they had 'medium confidence'.

What is certainly clear is that this time the process, negotiated by the political parties, is heavily engineered to prevent any surprises. In the first attempt in 2021-2022 the constitutional convention was dominated by left-wingers and independents with radical ideas and limited constitutional experience. As a result, a lot of the work was broad-brushed, hurried, and short on details, with big gaps left to be filled in by future law-making. The convention's radical ideas on indigenous rights, justice, the environment, and decentralisation appeared to be increasingly out of step with public opinion. Last September the draft constitution was rejected by a clear 62.5% majority in a nationwide referendum.

This time around the process has been turned upside down. The 24 members sitting on the committee of experts have been selected by the two chambers of congress and represent a balance principally between centre-right and centre-left. Their main job is intended to be technocratic: to agree an entire constitutional draft within the next three months, and well in advance of any more political discussions to be held by a 50-strong constitutional council which is set to be elected on 14 May.

There are two other safety mechanisms in place. The committee of experts will be bound by a declaration of 12 guiding principles, negotiated by the political parties last January [WR-23-02], which commits them to define Chile as a "rights based social and democratic state". It recognises indigenous rights but only within the framework of a "single Chilean nation" (thereby rejecting the plurinationality favoured in the first reform).

These principles also uphold a bicameral legislature, limiting earlier attempts to eliminate the senate. The second safety mechanism is a 14-member committee of jurists which will have task of ensuring consistency between different constitutional rules.

A total of 21 out of the 24 experts are lawyers; among the remaining three are a journalist, an economist, and a sociologist. According to Domingo Lovera, a constitutional lawyer chosen by Revolución Democrática (RD), a member of the ruling coalition, "Our job is to supply the constitutional council, which is the main protagonist in this process, with a complete constitutional draft. The council will decide which clauses it believes are good and to be adopted, which it will reject, and which it will amend. It has those three possibilities."

The final draft will be submitted to a referendum on 17 December. Success is far from a given, judging by recent opinion polls (*see sidebar*). Marco Moreno, a political scientist at Universidad Central said "citizens are suffering a kind of constitutional fatigue, they are tired of the whole process, and specially the excesses during the first attempt". He went on to say that citizens are currently more preoccupied with issues such as security, public order, migration, and the economy.

TRACKING TRENDS

BRAZIL | GDP figures highlight challenges. The Brazilian economy grew 2.9% in 2022, GDP figures released on 2 March by the national statistics institute (Ibge) show. Growth in the services (4.2%) and industrial (1.6%) sectors underpinned this expansion, while the agricultural sector contracted 1.7%, reflecting a smaller soya output due to adverse climatic conditions. On the demand side, family consumption buoyed growth, expanding 4.3% in the year – compared with 1.5% growth in government consumption.

GDP contracted 0.2% in the fourth quarter of 2022, the first negative quarterly result in over a year. This confirms an impending economic downturn this year and fans concerns that Brazil could even be headed for a recession, amid persistent inflation and high interest rates. The World Bank forecasts 0.8% growth for the Brazilian economy in 2023 in its latest Global Economic Prospects report.

Trying times for US-Mexico relations

Tensions over security and trade issues have flared up between Mexico and its northern neighbour in the past week. The kidnapping of four US citizens in the Mexican border city of Matamoros, Tamaulipas state, on 3 March has been deemed “unacceptable” by the White House and prompted debate around potential US intervention in Mexican security matters. Meanwhile, the US has initiated proceedings under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) on regional trade on two separate issues. These incidents look set to test relations between the countries as both Mexico’s President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and US President Joe Biden face differing internal pressures.

Security

The kidnapping of four US citizens in Matamoros has grabbed headlines worldwide. The US ambassador to Mexico, Ken Salazar, confirmed the kidnapping on 6 March, saying that “unknown assailants” had “violently kidnapped at gunpoint four US citizens” in an incident in Matamoros in which an innocent Mexican citizen was also killed.

The next day, Mexico’s public security ministry (SSPC) confirmed the four US citizens had been found in a building in Matamoros. Two were dead. A man identified as José ‘N’, who was guarding the four, was arrested. Tamaulipas attorney general Irving Barrios Mojica said the incident was most likely a case of mistaken identity, rather than a direct attack, while adding that all lines of enquiry remained open. Although acknowledging that the *Cártel del Golfo* drug trafficking organisation (DTO) has a strong presence in the area, he did not confirm whether this group was responsible for the attack.

In a press conference the same day, President López Obrador expressed regret for the incident but stated that some were using it for “political ends”, saying the US media was handling the story in a sensationalist manner. He pointed out that such extensive coverage did not take place when Mexicans were killed in the US. He also reiterated that his government would not let any other country intervene in Mexican affairs.

Indeed, the incident has sparked talk from US Republicans in particular about taking a more direct approach to tackling organised crime south of the border. Two possible tactics that have resurfaced in recent days, namely designating Mexican DTOs as foreign terrorist organisations (a proposition first put forward by 21 Republican state attorneys general on 8 February) and using the US armed forces to combat DTOs in Mexico. This latter idea was first presented in a joint resolution by US Representatives Dan Crenshaw and Michael Waltz in January.

Salazar was much more reserved. He spoke of the “imperative need to act against the cartels”, saying that the control that the *Cártel del Golfo* exerted over Mexico’s north-eastern border region was of particular concern, and of the need to work closely with the Mexican government to prevent future violent incidents. As pressure rises on the Biden administration to combat violence at the border and, in particular, to stem the flow of fentanyl being brought into the US by Mexican DTOs, it remains to be seen whether the cooperative or hardline approach will win out.

Terrorism in Mexico

In response to the proposal to designate Mexican DTOs as foreign terrorist organisations, President López Obrador pointed to the US Department of State’s 2021 report on terrorism, published on 27 February. The report stated that counterterrorism cooperation between Mexico and the US was strong in 2021 and that there was “no credible evidence indicating international terrorist groups established bases in Mexico, worked directly with Mexican drug cartels, or sent operatives via Mexico into the US in 2021”.

Another labour rights complaint

The US Department of Labour submitted a separate request under the USMCA on 6 March, asking for the Mexican government to review whether workers' rights were being denied at the Unique Fabricating plastics plant in Querétaro state. This is the seventh such request made under USMCA's Rapid Response Labour Mechanism (RRLM) and comes in response to a petition filed under USMCA by a workers' union claiming the company was obstructing workers' freedom of association and right to collective bargaining.

Trade

An escalation in a long-running trade dispute between Mexico and the US also took place on 6 March. The Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) announced it was requesting technical consultations under the USMCA in relation to "Mexican measures concerning products of agricultural biotechnology".

Specifically, these consultations relate to Mexican plans to phase out imports of genetically modified (GM) yellow corn, which the US says will disrupt billions of dollars in agricultural trade. The request for consultations comes despite recent attempts by Mexico to dial down the restrictions. On 13 February, López Obrador published a decree stipulating that while GM corn could not be used in products for human consumption, it would be permitted for use as animal fodder and in industrial manufacturing of products not for human consumption such as cosmetics, textiles, footwear, paper, and construction materials. This decree rendered obsolete a previous one which had ordered the phasing out of the use and import of all GM products and the herbicide glyphosate by January 2024.

However, while recognising the "sustained, active engagement" from the Mexican government on the issue, US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the US remained firm in its view that Mexico's current biotechnology trajectory was not grounded in science, "which is the foundation of USMCA".

López Obrador appears to be remaining firm in his view on the matter too. In a press conference on 7 March, he said that Mexico would continue to ban GM corn for human consumption while an agreement was being sought for Mexico's federal sanitary protection agency (Cofepris) to work with a qualified US agency to analyse whether or not GM corn is harmful to health. If an agreement could not be reached in time, he said that Mexico was willing to go to a dispute consultation panel as "it is a very important issue for us... the health of our people".

MEXICO | POLITICS

Tensions with supreme court intensify

Relations between Mexico's executive branch and supreme court (SCJN) have been on thin ice since Norma Lucía Piña Hernández took over as SCJN president from Arturo Zaldívar, an ally of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, on 2 January [WR-23-01]. Since then, López Obrador has levelled criticisms at the SCJN, accusing its justices of favouring criminals, and being untrustworthy, corrupt, and hypocritical. Tensions came to a head on 2 March, when an apparent death threat surfaced against Piña on social media, which Mexico's judicial sector and the political opposition stated was a consequence of López Obrador's antagonistic rhetoric.

When the new SCJN president was named at the start of the year, López Obrador immediately acknowledged that he and Piña had their differences. Nominated to the SCJN by former president Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), Piña has voted against some of López Obrador's key initiatives. While stating this was fine as the executive and judicial branches were independent of each other, López Obrador has ratcheted up criticisms of the court and its justices since her election.

Tensions have been exacerbated by the fact that the fate of the president's Plan B electoral reform, recently passed by the senate, lies in the hands of the SCJN. The court must rule on a series of constitutional complaints against the reform filed by the political opposition and the national electoral institute (INE). López Obrador has said that it would expose the "hypocrisy and corruption" of magistrates sitting on the SCJN if they were to annul the electoral reform and confirm that they are allied with the conservative

Yasmín Esquivel Mossa

While casting doubt on the credibility of many of the SCJN justices, President López Obrador has remained steadfast in his defence of justice Yasmín Esquivel Mossa in the row over her undergraduate law thesis. On 11 January, Mexico's national university (Unam) announced that Esquivel's thesis was a "substantial copy" of one submitted by another student. López Obrador, who nominated Esquivel to the SCJN in 2019, has said the affair has been overblown by the press and that the accusations of plagiarism have political motivations, a belief which he repeated on 3 March.

oligarchy. Eight of the 11 magistrates on the SCJN would have to declare the law unconstitutional for it to be rescinded.

The most recent criticism came on 2 March, when López Obrador claimed that since Piña had taken over as president of the SCJN there had been "a wave of resolutions in favour of alleged criminals". Hours after López Obrador made this statement, an online death threat targeted at Piña went viral on social media. A user on Twitter had shared an image on 28 February declaring Piña to be "the problem", accompanied by an image of a bullet, described as "the solution", under the caption "excellent idea".

Mexican judges and magistrates united in condemnation of the post, with Mexico's national association of federal judges (Jufed) calling for "a professional investigation" into the incident, which it said was a consequence of a "discourse of hatred", while the Mexican bar association (BMA) argued that "slandering judges without evidence...divides Mexican society [and] is not fitting for democrats or the leaders that the country needs". The political opposition issued similar responses, with the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) stating the threat was a result of polarisation generated by political discourse that sought to influence the independence of the court.

However, rather than denounce the death threat, López Obrador appeared to downplay it. In a press conference on 3 March, he even suggested that the death threat had been issued by one of the judges themselves saying they were capable of this as they were so "conservative". Piña, meanwhile, has responded by once again stressing the importance of judicial independence. During a meeting with judges and magistrates in Mexico City (CDMX) on 5 March, Piña urged justices to act with independence and responsibility when emitting rulings and to be "guardians of the constitution", saying that, "if we act with...the caution of judges, without confusing that with cowardice, all will go well".

MEXICO | SECURITY

Militarisation of public security fuels controversy

The expanding role of the military in Mexico and militarisation of public security has been a key feature of the last four years under the government led by President Andrés López Obrador, but it has been deeply controversial. On 7 March *The New York Times* ran a piece entitled "Spying by Mexico's Armed Forces Brings Fears of a 'Military State'", citing documents from an investigative report published last October alleging that the armed forces used Pegasus, a sophisticated spyware programme developed by the Israeli company NSO Group, to spy on two journalists and a human rights defender (HRD) between 2019 and 2021 despite reassurances from López Obrador that spying would never take place under his government [[WR-22-40](#)]. The HRD in the report is Raymundo Ramos, who just last week denounced the extrajudicial killings of five youths by an army patrol.

The five youths were shot dead by an army patrol in Nuevo Laredo in the northern state of Tamaulipas on 26 February. The army account of the incident is that the youths were driving in a pick-up truck with neither lights nor licence plates that sped away upon seeing the patrol, with soldiers opening fire after hearing a subsequent loud bang. Relatives of the victims were joined by local residents in then setting upon the soldiers as they endeavoured to tow the truck away, accusing them of having fired indiscriminately at unarmed youths returning from a night club. The soldiers fired shots into the air in order to disperse the crowd.

The Nuevo Laredo human rights committee filed a complaint with federal prosecutors. "The Mexican army is out of control. Prosecutors have to clear

Raymundo Ramos

The first question put to President López Obrador at his press conference was from Carlos Domínguez, who runs the pro-government online media outlet *Nación 14*, who claimed Raymundo Ramos worked for the *Cártel del Noreste*, playing a taped intercept of a phone call purportedly between Ramos and a supposed drug trafficker. “This is clearly a response by Sedena [the defence ministry],” Ramos claimed. “They are using the morning press briefing to smear me and to discredit the victims’ complaint,” he added.

up what happened, and the president must stop protecting the soldiers,” Ramos, the head of the committee, said. Nuevo Laredo has a history of drug-related violence, with the *Cártel del Noreste* (CDN), an offshoot of the old Zetas drug trafficking organisation (DTO), now the dominant criminal group.

Soldiers and marines have come under fire from members of the CDN. Last year staffing levels at the US consulate in Nuevo Laredo were reduced over concerns of an upsurge in violence after the capture of Juan Gerardo ‘El Huevo’ Treviño, the leader of the cartel. Relations between residents and the military have been tense, with 30 marines still under investigation for the ‘disappearance’ of civilians during 2014-2018. Ramos has investigated a number of the killings and disappearances.

In his morning press conference on 1 March, President López Obrador said various investigations had been opened by the attorney general’s office (FGR), the military prosecutor, and the national human rights commission (CNDH). He compared the situation to army involvement in 2014 during the previous administration, in the notorious and unsolved kidnapping of 43 student teachers in Ayotzinapa, Iguala, in the south-western state of Guerrero.

“It is best to clarify things,” he said. “I’m thinking of what sadly happened in Iguala with the young people from Ayotzinapa. Why hide things? That was a crime and an error. They should have told the truth and punished those responsible.” Given the military’s alleged use of Pegasus to spy on and discredit Ramos, it appears things are still being hidden. It was noteworthy that the very first question put to López Obrador during the press conference was not about the killings themselves but unfounded accusations of links between Ramos and DTOs (*see sidebar*).

CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

HAITI | DIPLOMACY & SECURITY

Caricom special mission to Haiti ducks key request

Jamaica’s Prime Minister Andrew Holness recently headed up a one-day Caribbean Community (Caricom) special mission to Haiti. The mission had been hotly anticipated amid ongoing discussions as to how the international community should respond to Haiti’s multifaceted security and political crisis which has intensified since the July 2021 assassination of president Jovenel Moïse (2017-2021). The Caricom mission produced pledges of support for Haiti’s national police (PNd’H) but no mention of deploying a foreign security mission which Prime Minister Ariel Henry has requested and for which United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres has repeatedly declared his backing.

A Caricom statement released on 6 March, following the mission’s deployment to Port-au-Prince on 27 February, said that it met with “a broad range of Haitian stakeholders to hear their views on the way forward to a Haitian-led solution” and highlighted that the Caricom heads of government agreed to support the PNd’H to address the security situation. It added that the focus will be the “provision of training” for PNd’H and “humanitarian assistance to [PNd’H] and the wider Haitian society”.

As with a 15-17 February Caricom meeting which took place in the Bahamian capital, Nassau, in which Haiti featured high on the agenda, there was no mention of sending a foreign military deployment, serving to once again

Sanctions

Also last month the US Department of State announced visa restrictions on five individuals and seven of their relatives in relation to the sanctions regime targeting gangs and their backers. This brings the total number of individuals on which the US has slapped visa restrictions to 44.

illustrate the controversial nature of the proposal. Indeed, while Prime Minister Holness previously suggested his government would support a united international effort in Haiti, to which Jamaica's military and police had "been alerted", there appears little appetite for this elsewhere.

A 27 February report by *Latin America Advisor*, a daily publication of the US think tank Inter-American Dialogue, suggests "some attention may have been paid to Ralph Gonsalves, the Prime Minister of St Vincent & the Grenadines, who said in November that his country won't send troops to Haiti". It cites Gonsalves as saying that "such a move by any country... could be seen by the Haitian people as propping up a government that the majority of Haitians see as illegitimate". With Caricom appearing to tout the 21 December 2022 political agreement launched by Henry, which involves the establishment of a high transition council [[WR-23-01](#)], albeit while calling for it to be "more inclusive", the international community continues to respond to the crisis in Haiti with more equipment for the PNd'H and sanctions targeting gangs and their backers. The latter is in line with an October 2022 UN Security Council resolution [[WR-22-41](#)] and continues to be applied by the US and Canada.

More sanctions

Last month the Canadian government announced that it had imposed sanctions relating to the financing of armed gangs on Haiti's former interim president (2016-2017) Jocelerme Privert and lawyer Salim Succar, the former chief of staff of former prime minister Laurent Lamothe (2012-2014), who himself has also been sanctioned by Canada. The media notes that Canadian sanctions now affect 17 Haitians from political and economic elites (*see sidebar*).

Meanwhile, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau – who has resisted a push for his country to lead an international military force – discussed the Caricom mission with Holness on 1 March, having attended the Nassau summit. Both the US and Canada have delivered equipment such as armoured vehicles to strengthen the PNd'H, while last month Trudeau, who announced back in January that Canada had airlifted Haitian-purchased vehicles to Haiti to support the PNd'H, highlighted the recent deployment of a Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) CP-140 Aurora long-range patrol aircraft to disrupt gang activity in Haiti. He also noted the delivery of three additional Haitian-purchased Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles and plans to deploy two Royal Canadian Navy Kingston-Class ships to Haiti in the coming weeks.

Gang situation worsening

Amid ongoing discussions regarding a foreign response, the security situation in Haiti continues to deteriorate. In one sign of this, on 24 February the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (Binuh) issued a statement warning of a rise in gang violence in Artibonite department, with 69 people killed and 83 injured since October 2022. This has drawn particular alarm given gang activity had previously been concentrated in Port-au-Prince, where gangs are believed to control an estimated 60% of the capital.

Binuh attributes this violence in Artibonite, which has led thousands to flee their homes in the communes of Liancourt, Verrettes, Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite, and L'Estère, to a local gang called Baz Gran Grif which has "established a climate of terror, characterised by looting, assassinations, kidnappings, destruction, extortion, hijacking of goods and trucks, and acts of rape on young girls and women".

The Binuh statement adds that the latest wave of violence began on 25 January when the gang launched a series of attacks on a police station in Liancourt commune, Artibonite department, killing seven PNd'H officers. It notes that a hospital in Deschapelles town, which served around 700,000 people in the region, suspended all of its activities on 16 February while various schools in the town remain closed and commercial activity and public transport has been considerably reduced.

POSTSCRIPT

Lula sticks to his (neutral) foreign policy guns

As part of his efforts in restoring Brazil's reputation and position on the international stage, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva sees his country playing a mediator role in international conflicts, notably the war between Russia and Ukraine. Never mind that a negotiated peace looks very unlikely in the current international climate.

Lula's position on the war in Ukraine has been a major point of difference in his discussions with Western leaders such as US President Joe Biden [[WR-23-07](#)] and Germany's Chancellor Olaf Schulz [[WR-23-05](#)]. Lula has point blank refused their calls for Brazil to support Ukraine's war efforts, defending instead a solution through "dialogue and peace".

Lula repeated such intentions in a video call with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky on 2 March and said he would discuss plans for forming a group of countries to mediate peace with China on a trip to Beijing later this month. While laudable, Lula's proposal for a peaceful resolution through dialogue does not seem to acknowledge the ongoing fighting in Ukraine, nor escalating tensions between China and the US.

Another foreign policy stance that tends to raise eyebrows is Lula's refusal to make a distinction between Latin America's two 'lefts': progressive social democrats and anti-democratic authoritarian governments. Brazil did not adhere to a United Nations (UN) report last week accusing the government led by President Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua of committing crimes against humanity against civilians.

Lula is far from alone in this regard. Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, for instance, has kept a studied silence on the repressive crackdown on opponents meted out by the Ortega government, on the pretext of non-intervention in a country's sovereign affairs, although this has not stopped him from being outspokenly critical (unlike Lula) of Peru's government led by President Dina Boluarte [[WR-23-08](#)].

López Obrador has offered Mexican nationality to Nicaraguans left stateless by the Ortega government, however, and Brazil is now pursuing a similar tack. At the UN Human Rights Council on 7 March the Brazilian representative expressed "extreme concern" over the decision to strip Nicaraguans of their nationality, offering to "receive those affected by this decision", and to empower them to apply for Brazilian nationality.

Quotes of the week

“All of Nicaragua is a crime scene.”

Jan-Michael Simon, the chair of the three-member panel of human rights experts on Nicaragua (GHREN) appointed by the United Nations, in an interview with local investigative media Confidencial.

“It is a shameful report...lacking legal and binding validity... Once again [the national assembly] has failed the country.”

Ecuador's government minister Henry Cuacalón on a report approved by the national assembly recommending opening an impeachment process against President Guillermo Lasso, accusing him of corruption.

“Today the armed forces co-govern with [President Andrés Manuel] López Obrador.”

Mexican independent senator Emilio Alvarez, former president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

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