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FEATURED Q&A

Does Argentina Have a Good Plan to Fight Drugs?



Police personnel training in Misiones, Argentina. President Mauricio Macri's plan calls for more coordination among law enforcement bodies to go after the drug cartels. // File Photo: Jonathan Hamner via CC License 3.0.

Q Argentine President Mauricio Macri on Aug. 30 unveiled a new initiative to combat a growing drug problem, promising the plan would fight both addictions and the illegal drug trafficking business. The initiative includes efforts to eliminate coca paste, an ingredient in cocaine, as well as more resources for police and the justice system, and protections for informants on drug cases. Will the initiatives succeed in reducing drug consumption and trafficking in Argentina? How bad is Argentina's problem with illegal drugs as compared to other Latin American countries, and what factors are behind the country's problems?

A Adam Isacson, senior associate for the regional security policy program at the Washington Office on Latin America: "Argentina faces a creeping illicit drug problem. Use of the cocaine derivative paco is widespread in poor neighborhoods, and Colombian and Brazilian cartels are using the country as a transit vector. But to address it, President Mauricio Macri is reaching back to the past. His 'Argentina Without Narcotrafficking' program neglects some key lessons learned, often painfully, over 40 years of drug policy. It places most emphasis on a greater deployment of security forces, centering the strategy in the Security Ministry (not Justice or Health). The president's 'win the war' rhetoric, meanwhile, signals a belief that Argentines might 'just say no,' 1980s-style: that drug abuse can be wiped out instead of managed and contained. Measuring success in kilograms neglects the larger problem of organized crime in Argentina. Macri's strategy would

Continued on page 2

TODAY'S NEWS

ECONOMIC

Mobile Access to Internet in Latin America Grows

The number of people across Latin America using their mobile devices to access the internet is set to grow by 50 percent by the end of this decade, with regional growth rates the second-highest in the world, behind sub-Saharan Africa, an industry study predicts.

Page 2

ECONOMIC

Japan's Abe to Visit Cuba This Week

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will visit Cuba this Thursday and Friday. The trip marks the first time a Japanese prime minister has visited the island, despite 400 years of bilateral ties.

Page 2

POLITICAL

U.N. Speeches Expose Region's Discord, Potential

Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski in his U.N. speech Tuesday expressed concern about what he called the "critical political, economic and social situation" in Venezuela.

Page 2



Kuczynski // Photo: Government of Peru.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.N. Speeches Expose Region's Differences, Potential to Improve

The 71st United Nations General Assembly got underway Tuesday with speeches from Latin American leaders that revealed both deep discord among neighbors and the potential for the region to overcome its challenges. In keeping with tradition, Brazil was the first country to speak to the assembly, but as President Michel Temer took the podium Tuesday morning, at least six Latin American countries left the auditorium in protest, Telesur reported. The delegations of Bolivia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela walked out of the room in objection to Brazil's "constitutional coup" last month that ousted impeached President Dilma Rousseff from office and put Temer in power until new elections are held in 2018. In his speech, Temer said Rousseff's impeachment was conducted with "absolute respect" for the rule of law and that confidence was returning to the country's weary economy, Reuters reported. Venezuela's political and eco-

omic crisis also proved controversial Tuesday, as Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski in his speech expressed concern about what he called the "critical political, economic and social situation" in Venezuela, citing shortfalls of food and medicine amid political gridlock in a system lacking checks and balances. Venezuela's representative to the United Nations, Rafael Ramírez, called Kuczynski's comments "a gratuitous attack," Reuters reported. "It was

“It was an unfortunate speech that shows that certain countries continue to interfere in our internal affairs.”

— Rafael Ramírez

an unfortunate speech that shows that certain countries continue to interfere in our internal affairs," Ramírez said. Kuczynski also said governments should focus on access to clean water, noting his administration is working to guarantee water and sewage access for 10 million people, almost a third of the country's population. The President of Costa Rica, Luis Guillermo Solís, highlighted the urgent need to

NEWS BRIEFS

Mobile Devices Accessing Internet in Latin America Set to Grow 50 Percent

The number of people across Latin America using their mobile devices to access the internet is set to grow by 50 percent by the end of the decade, according to a new study from GSMA, an telecom industry lobby group. The research forecasts that 150 million new mobile internet subscribers will be added in the region by 2020, bringing the total to 450 million. The overall number of unique mobile subscribers in Latin America is expected to reach 524 million by 2020, up from 414 million at the end of 2015, making Latin America the second-fastest growing region of the world, behind Sub-Saharan Africa.

Equity International Closes on First Brazilian Investment in Four Years

Chicago-based Equity International, an emerging markets investment firm founded by billionaire Sam Zell, said Tuesday that it has closed on its first investment in Brazil in four years. The 400 million reais (\$123 million) investment in Estapar Estacionamentos, the largest parking infrastructure and services operator in Brazil, involves over 1,000 parking lots in 75 municipalities and 17 states.

Abe to Make First-Ever Visit to Cuba by Japanese Prime Minister

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will visit Cuba this Thursday and Friday on his way home to Japan from attending the U.N. General Assembly in New York, the foreign ministry said. The trip marks the first-ever visit by a Japanese Prime Minister to Cuba. More than 10,000 Japanese tourists visited Cuba last year, an 80 percent increase as compared with 2014. The two countries signed a debt reorganization deal on Monday, Prensa Latina reported.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

do little to break organized crime syndicates' corrupt links to government, which threaten to undermine the whole effort. As Juan Tokatlian of Buenos Aires' Torcuato di Tella University noted in Clarín, 'The police, in particular, are part of the drug problem, as they play a crucial role in the regulation of the drug mafias' business.' Likewise, the strategy would do little to follow flows of illicit money into the 'legitimate' economy and political system. Macri is right to seek to reduce the harm that the drug trade inflicts on Argentina's citizens. But instead of cracking down in poor neighborhoods and giving new internal roles to the armed forces, a less backward-looking strategy would focus on organized crime while helping Argentina's addict population recover."

Amanda Mattingly, senior director for Latin America at The Arkin Group: "Historically, Argentina has not dealt with the same issues its Latin American neighbors have with respect to the illegal drug trade. However, the troubles related to narcotics now go beyond what was once isolated to the Tri-Border area. Now, as drug production and trafficking routes through Peru and Colombia have become more difficult, traffickers are seeking alternatives. In this context, it should come as no surprise that Argentina has become a point of transit for marijuana, cocaine, and heroin headed to Europe and Asia. U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency officials estimate that more than 70 tons of cocaine have crossed through

Continued on page 4

respect the human rights of refugees forced to leave their homes in search for safety for themselves as a result of armed conflicts or violence, natural disasters or the effects of climate change. "We are not fulfilling our commitment to leave no one behind. Mass media and the international community have paid little attention to the tragedy of thousands of migrants traveling across Latin America from south to north," Solis said, noting that from April to September of this year, 9,487 irregular migrants crossed his country's borders. Panama's President, Juan Carlos Varela, hit upon positive themes in his speech, referring to the successful expansion of the Panama Canal, the improved outlook for ending Colombia's decades-long war with guerrilla groups, wider use of clean energy sources and closer ties between the United States and Cuba.

BUSINESS NEWS

Russian, U.K. Firms Eying Argentine Shale Fields, YPF Says

Miguel Ángel Gutiérrez, president of Argentine state oil company YPF, said his company is in talks with three large oil and gas companies about investing in the Vaca Muerta shale formation, state news agency Télam reported Monday. Gutiérrez, speaking to investors in New York, revealed that YPF is discussing hydrocarbons projects in the area with Russian firm Gazprom, among others. Vaca Muerta, located mostly in the western province of Neuquén, holds the world's second-largest reserve of shale gas and fourth-largest of shale oil. At an investment conference last week in Buenos Aires, U.K.-based BP chief executive Bob Dudley highlighted the "enormous potential" in Vaca Muerta, adding that he thinks his firm will make further investment commitments in Argentina "by the end of the year," in an interview with Bloomberg News. President Mauricio Macri, elected late last year, has slashed consumer gas subsidies in the country, and gas bills are expected to rise significantly as a result.

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WITH HONOREES AND GUESTS

Juan Manuel Santos, the President of Colombia (invited), for efforts ending armed conflict and tireless work toward lasting peace

L. Enrique Garcia, the President, CAF—Development Bank of Latin America, presented with the Dialogue's Lifetime Achievement Award

Vanessa Van Der Linden Mota of Brazil, recognizing the global health community for cooperation and effectiveness against emerging health threats and challenges

Harald Krueger, Chairman of BMW, with Ludwig Willisch, chief executive of the Americas, accepting the Dialogue's award for exemplary corporate citizenship and a long-term commitment to Latin America and the Caribbean

Thomas A. Shannon, the U.S. Under Secretary of State and the highest-ranking Latin America expert in the history of the department, to deliver special remarks

Univision's María Elena Salinas, as master of ceremonies

and more to be named soon...

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FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 2

Argentina in recent years, and increasingly, Buenos Aires and provincial towns like Rosario—dubbed Argentina’s ‘narco capital’—have become points of production and consumption as well. President Macri’s initiative to fight the scourge of drugs by providing more resources to the police and judicial system for counter-narcotics will help roll back the gains cartels made during the Kirchner administrations, during which the government did little to acknowledge or address the situation. To be successful, Argentina will have to implement some of the same measures that Colombia and Mexico have, such as increased intelligence gathering and coordination among law enforcement bodies to go after the drug cartels. However, Argentina may do better to maintain their ‘drug war’ as a law enforcement and homeland security responsibility rather than as a military mission. Macri would also do well to emphasize the role of civil society in addressing domestic consumption and the need for early intervention and rehabilitation—something that the United States should do too.”

A **Megan Cook, junior consultant, and Juan Cruz Díaz, managing director, at Cefeidas Group in Buenos Aires:** “Macri’s launching of the ‘Argentina Without Narcotrafficking’ plan fulfills one of his major campaign promises. Drug trafficking and associated increases in violence played a prominent role in last year’s election. There is a widespread belief that drugs are a major problem, and a 2015 survey found that eight of 10 Argentines consider the drug trafficking problem to be ‘very serious.’ Two factors are driving Argentina’s drug problem: increasing consumption domestically, and growing popularity of the country as a shipping route. On the domestic front, the sale of illegal drugs in Argentina rose by about 15 percent between 2010 and 2015, according to the Universidad Católica de Argentina. On a broader scale, porous borders, lax controls over rural areas and transport infrastructure have made Argentina an increasingly

popular drug transit route. Certain regions and populations are most affected; the port city of Rosario in Santa Fe province—a major shipment point—has a homicide rate nearly three times the national average. While the problem it seeks to address is significant, the government’s ambitious drug-trafficking plan is rather thin on detail. The government has committed to eliminating paco use, mapping the drug trade, and improving statistics and radar coverage, among other objectives. It will also create ‘Special Mixed Groups’ of federal and provincial security forces. According to Security Minister Patricia Bullrich, federal security forces will arrive

“**Drug trafficking and associated increases in violence played a prominent role in last year’s election.**”

— Megan Cook and Juan Cruz Díaz

in Santa Fe Province by the end of September. This announcement builds on previous measures, such as Macri’s controversial decision in January to authorize the military to shoot down suspected drug-trafficking planes, and raises two potentially problematic issues: militarization and corruption. There are concerns that the plan will not do enough to address corruption in security forces and that it will lead to the increased militarization of security forces, a sensitive topic in Argentina and a technique that has a stained record in other countries. That said, announced intentions to strengthen the justice system, address social contributors to drug abuse and improve territorial control are valuable measures that could make important strides in the fight against drug trafficking.”

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

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