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FEATURED Q&A

What Is the Future of U.S. Relations With Nicaragua?



The Trump administration has condemned Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and has also deported Nicaraguan dissidents who had sought asylum. // File Photo: Nicaraguan Government.

Q Seven Democratic members of the U.S. House of Representatives on Sept. 3 sent a letter to President Donald Trump asking for the United States to put an end to deportations of Nicaraguan dissidents who had been seeking asylum. The Trump administration has frequently condemned Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's government, but the deportations have reportedly happened under a policy to prevent the spread of Covid-19. What is the current state of U.S. policy toward Nicaragua, and will the deportations continue? What is the future of relations between the two countries if Trump is re-elected in November? How would Trump's challenger, Joe Biden, change U.S. policy toward Nicaragua if he is elected president?

A Donna Shalala, member of the U.S. House of Representatives (D-Fla.): "Consistent with President Trump's effort to decimate the U.S. asylum system, beginning in April 2018, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) quietly acknowledged that it had begun collaborating with the Ortega regime in order to expedite deportations of Nicaraguans. In response, I led a letter last year urging the Trump administration to terminate its cooperation agreement with Ortega. Yet, that cooperation has tragically continued, despite Ortega's continued crackdown on political activists. Furthermore, the Trump administration has exploited the pandemic to accelerate its anti-immigrant agenda, issuing policy in March that has been used to expel asylum-seekers. What's more, recent news articles about the deportation of Nicaraguan dissidents confirmed some of our worst fears: deported Nicaraguans are often interrogated by Ortega regime officials, where, as

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Manaus May Have Reached Herd Immunity: Study

Residents of the Brazilian city of Manaus, which was hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, may have reached herd immunity from the disease, according to a new study.

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BUSINESS

Huawei to Open Second Chile Data Center This Year

Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei said it is planning to open a second data center in Chile before the end of the year. The data center will be located in the Santiago metropolitan area.

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POLITICAL

Opponents Demand Colombia Defense Minister's Resignation

Opposition politicians are demanding the resignation of Colombian Defense Minister Carlos Holmes Trujillo following the fatal shooting of a female civilian by a member of the military.

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Holmes Trujillo // File Photo: Colombian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Opponents Demand Colombian Defense Chief's Resignation

Opposition politicians in Colombia are calling for the resignation of Defense Minister Carlos Holmes Trujillo after news surfaced that a civilian woman, Juliana Giraldo, was allegedly shot and killed by a member of the military in the Cauca department, *El Tiempo* reported Thursday. The armed forces said in a statement that the accusation was passed along to the "competent authorities" to begin an investigation process. Several lawmakers have called on Holmes Trujillo to step down, with opposition legislator Juanita Goebertus blasting him for "keeping quiet" while the military already recognized its responsibility in what she called "the homicide of Juliana Giraldo Díaz," *El Tiempo* reported. The latest development came as social protests across Colombia returned this week, two weeks after Javier Ordóñez, a 46-year-old lawyer, died in police custody after officers repeatedly shocked him with a taser gun. Holmes Trujillo on Thursday reiterated an apology on behalf of police for the incident. His statement followed a ruling by the country's Supreme Court protecting Colombians' right to protest, which included an order for the defense minister to apologize for the role of police during protests. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in Wednesday's issue of the Advisor.]

Manaus May Have Reached Herd Immunity: Study

A new study suggests that residents of the Brazilian city of Manaus may have reached herd immunity from the novel coronavirus, state news agency Agência Brasil reported Wednesday. When Manaus experienced the peak of the pandemic in May, about 46 percent of the local population had already contracted Covid-19. A

month later, nearly 65 percent of the population had likely contracted the disease, with the amount of residents stabilizing at about 66 percent in August, according to the study, which examined the presence of Covid-19 antibodies in the local population and was conducted by the University of São Paulo School of Medicine. The study suggests that Manaus may have reached herd immunity, meaning that enough of the population has become immune to a disease that it can no longer spread effectively, *Agence France-Presse* reported. "The unusually high infection rate suggests that herd immunity played a significant role in determining the size of the epidemic," the authors, a group of 34 Brazilian and international researchers, wrote in the study, which has not yet undergone a peer review, *AFP* reported. "All signs indicate that it was the very fact of being so exposed to the virus that brought about the reduction in the number of new cases and deaths in Manaus," said the coordinator of the study, Ester Sabino, a medical professor at the University of São Paulo. Most scientists believe that between 60 percent and 80 percent of a population must either be vaccinated or have natural antibodies in order to attain herd immunity, Mike Ryan, executive director of the World Health Organization's health emergencies program, said in July, *CNBC* reported. Experts have also cautioned that it is unclear how long-lasting antibodies are and that achieving herd immunity through infection should not be a goal. "Community immunity via natural infection is not a strategy; it's a sign that a government failed to control an outbreak and is paying for that in lives lost," Florian Krammer, professor of microbiology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, said in a tweet, *AFP* reported. A city of 2.2 million people, Manaus in May saw its hospitals overrun, mass graves and corpses stacked in refrigerated trucks. However, deaths have fallen dramatically in recent weeks, to 3.6 on average over the past two weeks. Schools and businesses are now reopening quickly. The city has registered more than 2,400 deaths from Covid-19. As a whole, Brazil has more than 4.6 million confirmed cases of Covid-19, and more than 139,000 reported deaths from it, the third- and second-highest in the world, respectively, according to Johns Hopkins University.

NEWS BRIEFS

Brazil to Join Global COVAX Partnership, Earmarks \$454 Million

Brazil will join the so-called COVAX global Covid-19 vaccine partnership and will earmark 2.5 billion reais (\$454 million) for securing vaccines through it, said President Jair Bolsonaro's office, *Reuters* reported today. COVAX gives access to several vaccine candidates in developments globally. Brazil is planning to buy enough to immunize 10 percent of its population, the statement said. [See related [Q&A](#) in the Sept. 8 issue of the Advisor.]

Rio de Janeiro Postpones Carnival for First Time in More Than a Century

For the first time since 1912, Rio de Janeiro has decided to delay its annual Carnival parade next year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the city's League of Samba Schools, LIESA, said Thursday, the *Associated Press* reported. Rio's City Hall has not yet made an announcement about the Carnival street parties that also take place across the city in February, although the city's tourism promotion agency told the AP that large public events are unlikely to happen without a vaccine.

Huawei to Open Second Data Center in Chile Before End of Year

Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei is planning to open a second data center in Chile before the end of the year, Chinese state news agency *Xinhua* reported Wednesday. "This will bring many benefits to our users. It will help to provide greater security in case of a catastrophe and also allow Chile to prepare for the technological challenges to come in the future," Jason Jin, president of Huawei Cloud & AI in Chile, said in a statement. Huawei's second data center in Chile will be located in the Santiago area.

Chinese Fishing Fleet Off Coast of Peru Raises Tensions

A Chinese fishing fleet containing approximately 300 vessels has raised tensions in South America as it has moved from the edge of the Galapagos Islands into the waters off the coast of Peru, the Los Angeles Times reported Wednesday. The previous day, U.S. President Donald Trump blasted China on several issues in his speech to the virtual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, saying China “dumps millions and millions of tons of plastic and trash into the oceans, overfishes other countries’ waters” and destroys coral reefs. Also on Tuesday, the U.S. Embassy in Lima tweeted, “Pollution of the Pacific Ocean is a problem that affects more than 41 countries. The Chinese-flagged fleet off the coast of #Peru and Ecuador appears to be dumping plastics that pollute the sea. Who will hold them accountable?” China’s embassy in Peru responded by saying the United States was lying about the environmental and maritime activities of the fleet, the Los Angeles Times reported. “We hope that the Peruvian public is not deceived by false information,” it said.

BUSINESS NEWS

Colombia’s Rappi Raises More Than \$300 Mn in Funding

Colombian delivery app Rappi has raised more than \$300 million in a funding round that drew interest from investors from companies including T. Rowe Price, Reuters reported Thursday. “We are happy to work with this team of investors who trust our growth model, who believe in our region and the role we are playing,” Rappi said. The company had sought to raise \$350 million in the funding round, according to a U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filing.

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our own State Department has reported, they encounter the regime’s ‘policy’ of ‘exile, jail or death’ for anyone perceived as opposition. By expelling Nicaraguan dissidents who were reportedly tortured by Ortega’s security officials, the Trump administration alarmingly defies stated U.S. policy goals toward Nicaragua. Our letter to President Trump in response to press reports makes a simple request: Any such future asylum requests should be considered in accordance with U.S. law, and the administration should cease collaborating with the Ortega regime in deporting Nicaraguans. Rather than offering chest-pounding and cheap rhetoric, the Biden administration will consistently and unequivocally stand up to dictators—whether in Russia, North Korea, Venezuela or Nicaragua. Just as importantly, the United States will stand with those courageous individuals who bravely confront these repressive regimes.”

A **Ray Walser, professor of practice at Seton Hall University and retired U.S. Foreign Service officer:**

“The Trump administration’s rejection of Nicaraguan asylum seekers and their expedited deportation is yet another indication of its continued desire to close the southern border and force migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to return to their troubled home countries. According to press reports, seemingly legitimate asylum seekers—victims of Ortega-Murillo repression—were returned to Managua even after being quarantined. The legal explanation: fear of spreading Covid-19. In the constant tug of war between solidarity with the oppressed and an immigration hardline, the more punitive administration decision makers from the Stephen Millers down prevail. The administration finds it convenient to blame the lawlessness of the victims rather than acknowledge their plight. While the State Department routinely condemns the Ortega-Murillo dictatorship, its hollow strategy has generated little more than pub-

lic condemnation and targeted sanctions. As in the case of more numerous Venezuelans, the Senate, and presumably the administration, continue to resist extending Temporary Protected Status to fleeing Venezuelans and

“**It would appear that any serious alteration in policy hinges on the outcome of the November election.**”

— Ray Walser

now Nicaraguans. It would appear that any serious alteration in policy hinges on the outcome of the November election. A future Trump administration will likely stay the course. As for candidate Biden, there would be no embrace of the Ortega-Murillo regime but rather a readiness to review the status of Nicaraguan and other asylum seekers, stronger pro-democracy efforts and a more consistent voice on human rights in the Americas.”

A **Rebecca Bill Chavez, nonresident senior fellow at the Peter D. Bell Rule of Law Program at the Inter-American Dialogue and senior advisor at the Center for Naval Analyses:** “The Trump administration’s policy toward Nicaraguan dissidents reveals a deep chasm between its rhetoric and reality and represents one more blow to U.S. moral authority and ability to advance human rights and democratic values abroad. The administration has rightly condemned the Ortega regime for its violent repression of political opponents, including widespread torture and disappearances. In violation of U.S. law and values, however, it expels Nicaraguans fleeing oppression before they have a chance to make an asylum claim. In the most recent high-profile case, the deportees included a 22-year-old woman who arrived at our southern border with ample evidence

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of her persecution and torture at the hands of Nicaraguan security forces. She and other activists who had suffered beatings and electric shock were detained for more than two weeks without a credible-fear interview or access to an attorney before being sent back to Managua, where they are certain to face retaliation by the increasingly dictatorial Nicaraguan government. Joe Biden, who recognizes that Ortega is a dictator, has made it clear that his administration will respect U.S. and international law by ensuring that asylum seekers fleeing oppression have their cases heard. And, in contrast to Trump's efforts to terminate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for the 4,500 Nicaraguans who have built a life in the United States, Biden will protect TPS holders from returning to unsafe countries. So many of these TPS holders have been in the United States for an extended period of time and have become an essential part of their communities."

A **Christine J. Wade, professor of political science and international studies at Washington College in Chestertown, Md.:**

"The deportation of Nicaraguan dissidents is discouraging but not surprising, given the Trump administration's attacks on our asylum system. The administration's approach to abuses in Nicaragua has consisted of remonstrations and targeted sanctions, but these have seemingly been piecemeal acts rather than a coherent policy. Given the administration's general disinterest in regional issues beyond immigration, I don't necessarily expect anything to change if Trump is re-elected. With Nicaragua's next elections scheduled for November 2021, a Biden administration could have a very small window to potentially influence some nego-

tiations between Ortega and the opposition prior to the elections if it were to proceed with caution and focus on matters such as electoral reform. Of course, Nicaragua's divided opposition poses challenges for any U.S. policy going forward. I suspect there would be a temptation in the Biden admin-

“Nicaragua's divided opposition poses challenges for any U.S. policy going forward.”

— Christine J. Wade

istration to attempt to unite the opposition à la 1990, but that temptation would be misguided. While the United States should actively promote human rights and civil and political liberties, it must be cautious of any overreach that would facilitate the Ortega regime's portrayal of the opposition as a tool of U.S. interventionism. There is certainly a case to be made for an outside mediator. Whether a future U.S. administration could play a constructive role in moving dialogue forward remains to be seen. I am, admittedly, dubious given the historic relationship between the United States and Nicaragua—and Ortega in particular—but stranger things have happened."

Editor's note: The Advisor requested commentaries for this issue from the U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua and from Nicaragua's ambassador to the United States, but received no reply from either of them.

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

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