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FEATURED Q&A

Should Colombia Change its Approach to the EMC Rebels?



Colombian President Gustavo Petro is weighing whether to halt a cease-fire with the Estado Mayor Central, or EMC, rebel group after it launched new deadly attacks. // File Photo: Colombian Government.

Q Colombian President Gustavo Petro is considering whether to suspend a cease-fire with the Estado Mayor Central, or EMC, following two bombings blamed on the rebel group that killed four people, including two police officers, and injured several others in Cauca province, the country's defense minister said last week. The government has been in ongoing peace negotiations with the EMC, a dissident FARC faction that refused to demobilize during Colombia's historic peace process, but the group has continued carrying out attacks, derailing cease-fire agreements. What motivated the recent spate of attacks by the EMC, and what is the group attempting to accomplish by continuing its attacks? Has Petro's approach to the EMC so far failed, and how should he approach the group's continuing violence? Are recent events evidence of a split within the EMC or a change in the conflict's dynamics?

A Peter DeShazo, visiting professor of Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies at Dartmouth College and former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs: "President Petro's 'Total Peace' policy has failed to stem the rising tide of insecurity and drug trafficking in Colombia. In March, the government suspended a cease-fire agreement with EMC units in southwest Colombia following an attack on an Indigenous reserve, and further EMC violence prompted Petro to declare a 'total offensive' against the EMC in this region. These recent EMC attacks underscore the futility of negotiating cease-fire agreements and peace talks with criminal

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Venezuela Revokes Invitation for E.U. to Observe Vote

Venezuela on Tuesday withdrew its invitation for a European Union mission to observe Venezuela's July presidential election. Venezuela cited E.U. sanctions for the decision.

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BUSINESS

Hess Shareholders Back Sale to Chevron Amid Exxon Dispute

Shareholders of U.S.-based energy firm Hess on Tuesday approved selling the company to Chevron for \$53 billion. However, a dispute between Chevron and ExxonMobil over a massive oil block in Guyana threatens the deal.

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POLITICAL

Haiti's Council Taps Conille as Prime Minister

Haiti's transitional presidential council on Tuesday selected Garry Conille, a United Nations development specialist, as the country's new prime minister.

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Conille // File Photo: @ConilleGarry via X.

POLITICAL NEWS

Haiti's Transitional Council Taps Conille as Prime Minister

Haiti's transitional council on Tuesday named United Nations development specialist Garry Conille as the country's prime minister, the Associated Press reported. Conille's selection came a month after the council had named a different prime minister, Fritz Bélizaire, a former sports minister, to the post in a split decision that had threatened to derail the council amid disunity. The controversy led the council to start a new process to select an interim leader for the gang-embattled country, with dozens of names being submitted for the position. Six of the council's seven voting members supported Conille; one member, Laurent St. Cyr, was out of the country and did not vote, council member Louis Gérald Gilles told the

AP. On social media site X, Conille said he was "very honored" to be selected. Conille submitted his resignation on Tuesday as the regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean at UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, a position he has held since January 2023, the AP reported. He was previously Haiti's prime minister from October 2011 to May 2012 under then-President Michel Martelly. A physician by training, Conille helped to coordinate reconstruction efforts after Haiti's catastrophic 2010 earthquake, The New York Times reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

Hess Shareholders Back Sale to Chevron Amid Exxon Dispute

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NEWS BRIEFS

Venezuela Revokes Invitation for E.U. to Observe July Election

Venezuela's electoral authority on Tuesday revoked its invitation for a European Union mission to observe the country's July presidential election, in which President Nicolás Maduro is seeking to extend his 11 years in power, the Associated Press reported. The head of the electoral council, Elvis Amoroso, cited E.U. economic sanctions as the reason for the invitation's withdrawal. However, the European Union only maintains sanctions against more than 50 Venezuelans accused of repression or undermining democracy, not against the government itself, the AP reported.

Brazil's Lower House Approves Tax on Low-Cost Online Purchases

The lower house of Brazil's Congress on Tuesday voted to advance a bill to tax low-cost international online purchases, Reuters reported. The proposal would apply a 20 percent import tax to foreign online sales under \$50, significantly lower than the 60 percent the bill originally proposed. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has expressed opposition to the bill, which now heads to the Senate.

Argentina's Milei Names Francos as Cabinet Chief Amid Struggle on Reforms

Argentine President Javier Milei on Monday accepted the resignation of cabinet chief Nicolas Posse, who, according to a government statement, will be replaced by current Interior Minister Guillermo Francos, Reuters reported. The change marks the first cabinet shakeup in Milei's government and comes amid an economic downturn and a protracted struggle for Milei's administration in pushing its reforms through Congress.

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organizations that have no motivation to disband. The peace process with the FARC during the Santos administration came to fruition because the government had neutralized the FARC militarily, held the upper hand in the negotiations and had a willing counterpart: the FARC secretariat. Without effective state control over large areas where illegal armed groups exercise de facto rule, the government is not currently in a position to negotiate anything more than short-term cease-fire agreements that allow these violent gangs additional breathing space. Negotiation is further complicated by the increasing tendency of illegal groups to splinter into factions. Petro should scrap the concept that violent drug-trafficking gangs with a veneer of revolutionary ideology deserve more benevolent treatment than violent drug trafficking gangs without such orientation. This is not to imply that Colombia should adopt a 'mano dura' policy, but rather a whole government approach to

establishing legitimate state authority and citizen security, beginning with effective control of territory by the military, if necessary, then police—but followed immediately by investments in health, education, infrastructure and administration of justice."

A **Jennapher Lunde Seefeldt, associate professor of government and international affairs at Augustana University:** "Recent events are indicative of both a split within the EMC and a shift in policy response to the remaining guerrilla groups in Colombia. After a rebel group attack on an Indigenous community, Petro suspended the cease-fire in southwest Colombia. This suspension was the catalyst for the EMC faction split, with regional leaders disagreeing on whether to continue negotiations with the government. These circumstances present a new future for the Total Peace plan. The state is now dealing with fragmented allegiances

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corporation for \$53 billion to oil and gas giant Chevron, The New York Times reported. The potential deal has sparked conflict over the potential rights to an oil drilling project in Guyana. U.S. oil major ExxonMobil first found significant oil deposits in Guyana in 2015 and has since led drilling in the massive, oil-rich Stabroek Block, located off the coast of Guyana. Hess holds a stake in the Stabroek Block as a junior partner to Exxon's drilling project there, and Chevron wants to acquire that stake in the lucrative project through its acquisition of Hess. However, Exxon has contested that piece of the deal, arguing that it has the right of first refusal and should have the opportunity to buy the stake held by Hess in the Guyana project. Chevron and Hess dispute Exxon's interpretation of the partnership, and Exxon has filed for arbitration proceedings to resolve the disagreement. The dispute may not be settled until 2025, Exxon CEO Darren Woods told CNBC in an interview on May 6. "What we need to do is take our time to do what's right to make sure that we do all the due diligence and we get to the answer, the right answer," Woods said, CNBC reported.

U.S. Files Labor Complaint Over Mexico VW Plant

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative on Tuesday filed a labor complaint over allegations that Volkswagen de México fired workers at a plant operated by the automaker in retaliation for union activity. "Today's action reflects the United States' unwavering commitment to ensuring workers can engage in union activity without fearing reprisals," U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in a statement. "Workplaces should respect, not punish, workers exercising their freedom of association and collective bargaining rights, and this is how we are empowering workers and their communities through the USMCA," she added. Through the action, the U.S. government is asking Mexico to investigate whether workers at a Volkswagen plant in Cuautlancingo in Puebla state, are being denied rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining, the U.S.

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

What Will Help Brazil Recover From Deadly Flooding?

Q **Catastrophic flooding in Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul state has killed more than 150 people and has left more than half a million people displaced. Experts say the disaster could set off one of the largest cases of climate-related migration in Brazil's recent history. The government on May 9 announced a roughly \$10 billion aid package to address the disaster and help victims. Has Brazil's government gone far enough in addressing the tragedy? What other policy initiatives might be needed to ameliorate the current crisis? How will internal migration sparked by the flood affect Brazil, and does Rio Grande do Sul portend coming trends in climate-related migration? What policies and initiatives need to be implemented to ensure flooding and rains like these do not cause such destruction again?**

A **Christian Poirier, program director at Amazon Watch:** "This month's tragic flooding in Rio Grande do Sul is best understood not as a severe natural disaster, but rather a direct consequence of a human-provoked climate crisis that foreshadows more and worse disasters to come. While Brazil's federal government swiftly and effectively mobilized significant resources to address the catastrophe, the time has passed for reactive strategies to address spiraling climate effects, and it demands a closer

examination of the political choices that are sacrificing our collective wellbeing. Rather than advancing policies that would simultaneously prevent future disasters while forging meaningful adaptation plans, Brazil's agribusiness and extractive industry lobbies—with whom Rio Grande do Sul's governor, Eduardo Leite, is closely aligned—are pursuing a political agenda that recklessly slashes socio-environmental safeguards fundamental to containing today's climate crisis. For example, by relentlessly undermining the right of Indigenous peoples to their territories, of which 98 percent are located in the climate-stabilizing Amazon rain forest, these forces are working to lock in a new generation of extreme weather events like what we have watched unfold in Brazil's south. While today's emergency should provoke a profound and immediate political realignment that prioritizes the protection of forests and forest peoples, Brazil's Congress is doubling down on a regressive anti-environmental agenda. The costs for these shortsighted and profit-driven choices will continue to be paid in the lives of frontline communities."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment above is a continuation of the Q&A published in the May 24 issue of the Advisor.

Trade Representative's office said. The request was made in response to a petition filed by former workers of Volkswagen, the office said. It added that the request marked the 23rd time that the United States has invoked the Rapid Response Labor Mechanism, or RRM, of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement and the fifth time this year. "To date, the RRM has directly benefited almost 30,000 workers and their families, and we look forward to working

with the government of Mexico to address the issues at this facility," Tai said in the statement. "We are deeply concerned by the alleged violations of freedom of association at the Volkswagen plant in Puebla, especially given its historic place in Mexico's economy and its independent trade unionism movement," said Thea Lee, the deputy undersecretary for international labor affairs at the U.S. Department of Labor.

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based on region. Petro's administration is keenly aware that rebel leaders are unable to contain all of their followers. The factions that favor cease-fire and peace talks contain about 40 percent of the overall EMC membership. Peace talks will likely yield countless micro-negotiations at the regional level instead of a centralized solution, with a variety of expensive promises to assuage each group. But these talks could result in pockets of Colombia seeing increased security and stability. Remaining individual groups (like the EMC, ELN and Gulf Clan) are still fighting for area control, so a cease-fire agreement between a regional group and the government does not guarantee inter-group peace. All groups continue to increase kidnappings, extortion, illegal mining and drug trafficking. The vacuum after the FARC was not readily filled with policy solutions meant to counter guerrilla group motives, so these remainders require Petro to create tailored solutions for the needs of the regions. Petro's plan is not lost, but it needs significant readjustment in light of recent events."

A Sergio Guzmán, director at Colombia Risk Analysis: "The government's landmark Total Peace policy aims to end Colombia's armed conflict through negotiations with all insurgent and criminal groups. However, this effort offers too many concessions and lacks sufficient pressure, jeopardizing its success. Despite some initial successes, the bilateral cease-fire with the EMC has strengthened the group, leading to attacks on military units and harm to rural and urban populations without a strong government response. The strategy of focusing on cease-fires without military leverage has weakened the government's position, allowing armed groups to expand their control. As a result, violence has surged in places like Cauca, with increases in massacres, extortions, forced displacements and likely rises in coca cultivation and illegal mining. The government faces credibility issues due

to unfulfilled commitments from the 2016 peace accords, ongoing violence against former FARC fighters and inadequate implementation of promised programs. For Total Peace to succeed, the government must balance negotiations with legitimate force, set clear deadlines, maintain international support and honor previous agreements. Without these adjustments, achieving lasting peace remains uncertain. We believe there will be no Total Peace in 2024, as Petro's flawed negotiation tactics and poor implementation of past agreements may lead to more violence in the future."

A Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli, director for the Andes at the Washington Office on Latin America:

"The EMC is a conglomerate of five autonomous dissident FARC factions that operate in different regions. In Cauca, it has attacked and killed 374 people and committed many horrendous abuses against the Indigenous Nasa in the past four years. This prompted Indigenous authorities to state that the group seeks to exterminate them. This faction includes Indigenous peoples who are exacting revenge against the traditional Indigenous leadership and its judicial system. Since the start of this faction's allegiance to a unified EMC and peace talks with the government have been weak, this breakdown is not surprising. The EMC is interested in controlling territories to control illicit economies, not taking over the state. This faction has shown little willingness to abide by any steps needed in a negotiation. The government is in a position where it should protect Indigenous communities from further fighting and recruitment. That said, continuing talks with the other factions serves to protect civilians in the other areas."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.

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