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Opposition wins key battlegrounds in Ecuador as voters clip Correa's wings

Ecuador's President Rafael Correa had painted an anarchic vision of "destabilisation after destabilisation, boycott after boycott" should the opposition gain control of Quito in municipal elections on 23 February. Voters did not heed his warning and Quito fell to the opposition, which performed well nationwide. Correa blamed his party Alianza País (AP) for "sectarianism" and promised a shake-up of the party's provincial leadership, but this overlooks his direct participation in the campaign, which he had said was necessary because at stake were not so much local elections as the future of his 'Citizens' Revolution'. Correa retains a firm grip on national power but by neglecting local concerns a campaign that started off with the objective of displacing the last remnant of the 'partidocracia', the mayor of the coastal city of Guayaquil, Jaime Nebot, ended up in defeat in nine of Ecuador's 10 most populous cities.

This was the first electoral setback for President Correa since he came to power seven years ago. He said the result was "neither an electoral failure nor a victory" and that the AP had emerged as "the main political force" in Ecuador, winning the majority of the 221 mayoralties being contested and the bulk of the 24 prefectural (provincial) elections, according to the quick count of the national electoral council (CNE), which is yet to release final results.

Nebot won Guayaquil at a canter for the opposition Partido Social Cristiano-Madera de Guerrero (PSC-MG), by 58%-38%, against his AP rival, Viviana Bonilla. It is a painful paradox for Correa that while he has managed to extend his Citizens' Revolution to almost every corner of the country, his birthplace of Guayaquil has singularly failed to embrace it, remaining almost a country apart. Now, however, Correa will also face bastions of opposition in other significant cities. By far the biggest blow was the loss of Quito to Mauricio Rodas, who defeated the incumbent AP mayor, Augusto Barrera, by 21 percentage points (59%-38%).

Rodas only launched his party, Sociedad Unidad Más Acción (Suma), in 2012, but it ended up winning more of the 24 provincial capitals than any other party, including AP, according to the CNE quick count. Portoviejo, the capital of the coastal province of Manabí, went to Suma's Agustín Casanova; and Suma also won in Santo Domingo de los Colorados, the capital of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas; Guaranda, the capital of the southern highlands province of Bolívar; and Puyo, the capital of the Amazonian province of Pastaza, giving the party a national presence. It outperformed the right-of-centre Creando Oportunidades (Creo), whose presidential candidate Guillermo Lasso came second to Correa in the presidential elections this time last year. Creo took three provincial capitals, including Babahoyo (Los Ríos). The PSC also took three provincial capitals, including Machala, capital of the south-western coastal province of El Oro.

Extending influence

It is worth recalling that Alianza País did not perform particularly well in the 2009 municipal elections, when it won just 63 out of 221 mayoralties. By dint of assiduous courtship of local officials over the intervening years, however, it grew to all-but triple its presence at this level, securing control of 170 mayoralties heading into the elections on 23 February. It is likely to try and do the same now with the dozens of local parties that come to power in many of the country's smaller municipalities.

AP only won two (eponymous) provincial capitals - Esmeraldas and Orellana - although this could be doubled if it wins two more closely contested, and undeclared, contests. Correa blamed AP for failing to strike up alliances with like-minded parties, such as Avanza, founded by the industry minister, Ramiro González. Avanza won three provincial capitals - Latacunga (Cotopaxi); Ibarra (Imbabura); and Ambato (Tungurahua), all in the northern highlands. González pledged Avanza's full support for the Correa administration and the Citizens' Revolution but he stressed that this was not the same thing as supporting AP, which he implied was excessively dogmatic and too reliant on a national rather than a local discourse.

This explains why AP performed better in the prefectural elections, winning nine of the 24 contests, according to the CNE quick count, as the prefects function more like central government 'viceroys' with far less influence over local matters than mayors. In this sense, the prefectural results also underline that support for Correa remains strong, but that voters disagreed with his determination to amass absolute power across all levels of government (and preside over the evisceration of the opposition), which he had argued was necessary for the consolidation of his Citizens' Revolution.

It is worth noting that Rodas fought his campaign in Quito on local issues and by dismissing the ideological dichotomy of Left and Right as obsolete; he advocated "responsible government" as the key to progress. This is anathema to Correa and Latin America's 'progressive Left' which thrives precisely on stigmatising all opposition as representative of a fascist Right determined to uphold the oligarchy and exploit the people. Rodas' non-confrontational rhetoric clearly resonated with some *Quiteños*, although he also benefited from Barrera's campaign blunders, over local issues such as parking fines and toll charges (see the latest edition of our *Andean regional report* for a profile of Rodas and a detailed analysis of the reasons behind his victory).

In his victory speech, Rodas announced that he would "turn the page" on the combative campaign and that he was happy to hold a "constructive" dialogue with the central government based on "mutual respect". It is not clear whether Correa will be prepared to meet him halfway. While admitting that the defeat in Quito "hurt", Correa conceded that he did not know Rodas, but that he did know "the people behind him", who, he claimed, were right-wingers intent on destabilising his government and other models of 21st century socialism in the region, such as Venezuela. He said he had no problem working with "political adversaries" but he drew the line at working with "enemies".

While AP fell some way short of Correa's ambitious objectives, it is important to note that Correa is still in a position of unprecedented strength for an Ecuadorean head of state, capable of pushing his policy agenda through a unicameral legislative assembly controlled by his party. The cumulative total of mayoralties won by AP and Avanza should give him the majority of mayoralties, if not the largest cities.

And, crucially, the opposition is not united. While Rodas might be tempted to forge an axis with Nebot between Ecuador's two main cities - Quito and Guayaquil - he is also keen to cooperate with the central government, if only because he cannot speak for the variegated opposition nationwide. Pachakutik, the political arm of the umbrella indigenous group Conaie, for instance, also performed well in the elections, taking the prefectures of Cotopaxi and Orellana, and the southern provinces of Zamora Chinchipe and Morona Santiago, where there is considerable opposition to the Correa administration's mining policies - but Pachakutik is no ally of Suma. Similarly, although the incumbent AP mayor, Paúl Granda, was defeated in Ecuador's third largest city of Cuenca, the capital of Azuay province, the victor, Marcelo Cabrera, of the left-wing coalition Igualdad-Participa, is closer to AP than Suma.

PM's exit exposes divisions at heart of government

There cannot be too many examples of a government managing to squander a surge in support quite so suddenly and spectacularly. President Ollanta Humala's popularity, which jumped in the wake of the nationalist sentiment stirred up by Peru's maritime triumph over Chile at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), fell to a new nadir just three weeks later. An attempt to capitalise on the feel-good factor by doubling ministerial salaries backfired; then internal divisions in the cabinet were laid bare by an unedifying spat over plans to raise the minimum wage. This culminated in the prime minister, César Villanueva, tendering his resignation just four months after he was hailed as the one politician capable of rescuing a fraught dialogue process with the opposition and transforming the government's rocky relations with the regions and civil society.

Several opinion polls showed President Humala's approval rating leap by up to eight percentage points shortly after the ICJ ruling on 27 January, but the first poll released since the decision to double ministerial salaries [WR-14-06], by GFK on 23 February, indicated that this goodwill had been spent and he had fallen by a similar amount to just 21% support. Just 9% of respondents supported the decision to double ministerial salaries.

Former president Alan García (1985-1990; 2006-2011) led the criticism of the decision to lift the ministerial salary to NS\$30,000 (US\$10,600) per month, which he said was a "scandalous" 40 times the minimum wage. Prime Minister Villanueva sought to repair some of the damage on 19 February by announcing that the minimum wage would soon be raised from its current level of NS\$750 (US\$267), benefiting 650,000 people, or 10% of the workforce, only for this to be publicly disclaimed by First Lady Nadine Heredia and Economy Minister Luis Miguel Castilla.

With Humala away on a foreign trip to the Middle East, Heredia undermined Villanueva the day after his announcement by stressing that increasing the minimum wage was "not under discussion at the moment". On 23 February, in an interview with the current affairs TV programme *Cuarto Poder*, Castilla said he had not spoken to Villanueva about the minimum wage; that it was not the right time to increase it; and that it could be seen as "demagogic", while the government was "responsible in economic matters". He added that he had reacted with "surprise at the premier's declaration" as "there is no such initiative in the government".

In the face of such an emphatic slap down, Villanueva clearly felt he had no alternative but to go. But the public disagreement over the minimum wage was merely the catalyst for his resignation, pointing towards deeper divisions within the cabinet. It is worth noting that Villanueva never got around to naming his own cabinet, as promised, and as such never managed to stamp his authority on it. The respected political analyst Mirko Lauer, writing in *La República*, claimed this week that there was a struggle between Castilla, who wanted to appoint technocrats to the cabinet, and Villanueva who wanted professionals with political ability.

The spat over the minimum wage confirmed that Villanueva was not calling the shots. It also underscored the friction between Humala's stated intention of running a left-wing government with a focus on social inclusion, and the reality of an orthodox economy ministry with a focus on macroeconomic stability. Three of Humala's first four prime ministers were leftists and all of them were marginalised with limited room for manoeuvre.

The newlook cabinet

Humala's fifth prime minister is René Cornejo, who has served as housing minister since the start of Humala's tenure in July 2011. His appointment

Cabinet changes

Other cabinet changes saw Ana Jara, women's minister, take over the labour portfolio from Nancy Laos, who had agreed with the replaced prime minister, César Villanueva, that lifting the minimum wage was being discussed. Jara is a firm ally of First Lady Nadine Heredia. Milton Von Hesse takes over from Prime Minister René Cornejo at the housing ministry and the deputy minister for development and agrarian infrastructure, Juan Manuel Benites, replaces Von Hesse at the agriculture ministry. Paola Bustamante Suárez replaces Mónica Rubio as minister for development and social inclusion.

Growth slows down but still strong

Peru registered GDP growth of 5.02% in 2013, marking 15 years of consecutive growth, according to the national statistics institute (Inei). The strongest growth was recorded in the fishing sector (12.66%); finance and insurance (9.07%); and construction (8.56%). Growth was 1.18 percentage points lower than in 2012, but consistent with the forecast of 5.1% made by the economy and finance ministry and the central bank. The service sector is still booming - restaurant and hotel growth was 6.41%. Inei reported that 20,476 restaurants and 2,090 hotels opened in 2013.

clearly strengthens Castilla as they see eye to eye on economic policy. Cornejo, a former executive director of the State investment promotion agency (Proinversión), said he would focus on attracting investment to drive development.

It was noteworthy that the president of the business federation (Confiep), Alfonso García-Miró, praised Cornejo's appointment, and a ministerial reshuffle that brings in technocrats such as Eleodoro Mayorga Alba, who previously served as an energy expert and senior petroleum economist at the World Bank (1991-2009), and Piero Ghezzi, an economist who worked at Barclays Bank. Mayorga replaces Jorge Merino as the new energy and mines minister, while Ghezzi takes over as production minister from Gladys Triveño (who was under fire for restrictions imposed on coastal fishing to protect juvenile fish). García-Miró said the ministers had the right profiles to manage their portfolios "in the most technical and professional way possible".

The ringing endorsement from Confiep naturally meant the cabinet was rejected by the Left, and Humala's alienated former ally, the umbrella trade union Confederación General de Trabajadores del Perú (CGTP). The national coordinator of the CGTP, Carmela Sifuentes, said the appointments were "negative for the working class", and organised a march in Lima on 26 February to protest against the ministerial salary increase, among other things.

Cornejo sought to persuade doubters that social inclusion would remain the cornerstone of the Humala administration's policy and that his cabinet would aim to be "closer to the people": ministers, he said, would get out and about more, and contact with regional governments would be improved (something Villanueva had been appointed to deliver). Regional elections will be held in October this year.

Cornejo's promise came after he was confronted with an immediate challenge in the form of a 48-hour strike in Cusco, with demonstrators demanding that work begin on the delayed Chinchero International Airport and the Gasoducto Sur pipeline (a decision to award the concession has been twice postponed, incidentally, by Proinversión). Cornejo vowed that the pipeline would be in place before the end of Humala's term in 2016.

Opposition criticism

Juan Carlos Eguren, a deputy for the opposition Partido Popular Cristiano (PPC), encapsulated much of the opposition reaction to the cabinet change by criticising the untrammelled intervention of First Lady Heredia in the running of government, which he said had become "a factor absolutely distorting democratic institutionalism".

If Humala had hoped to win over his estranged ally Perú Posible, the party of former president Alejandro Toledo (2000-2006), by appointing Carmen Omonte, PP spokeswoman and congressional vice-president, as women's minister, he will have been disappointed by the response of the party spokesman, José León. León said Omonte's decision was her own and criticised the formation of "a cabinet behind the backs of the people, in which Castilla in practice will be the premier". It is inconceivable, however, that Omonte would have taken up her post without getting the nod from Toledo, who, facing a congressional corruption probe, could do with eyes and ears in the presidential palace.

VENEZUELA | POLITICS

Maduro opts for six-day party to douse protests

Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro has declared 27 and 28 February public holidays to mark 25 years since the *Caracazo* in 1989, when massive protests against the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-9, 1989-93) were brutally repressed. The local business federation Fedecámaras

Cuba

Over 100 students marched to the Cuban embassy in Caracas this week to hand over a 'statement to the Cuban dictatorship' demanding an end to Havana's alleged "interference" in Venezuela's domestic concerns. The embassy was surrounded by a thick cordon of national guardsmen and police, compelling the students to hand the letter over to an officer who took it inside. The opposition leader, Henrique Capriles Radonski, listed "removing the Cuban government's influence over the armed forces" as one of his '10 proposals to advance' this week.

rejected the decision, as it means that Venezuela will have six straight days of rest, given the weekend and then public holidays for Carnival on Monday and Tuesday next week, at a time when the country is suffering from acute shortages of food and basic goods. The first day back at work will technically be Wednesday 5 March but the government is also planning special events on this day to mark the first anniversary of the death of former president, Hugo Chávez (1999-2013).

"Long live Carnival!" President Maduro said from the Miraflores presidential palace on 23 February. "A country doesn't move ahead with festivals, but work, work and more work", the vice-president of Fedecámaras, Carlos Larrazábal, responded, arguing that the decision conspired against a solution to the present shortages, already exacerbated by the protests as street barricades have caused distribution problems. Maduro's calculations are political rather than economic, however, and he is banking on the ongoing protests running out of steam if Venezuelans have the prospect of a prolonged party.

The foreign minister, Elías Jaua, said commemorating the *Caracazo* would allow Venezuelans to reflect on the brutality of the oligarchy and how, by rising up, the people paved the way for the Bolivarian Revolution, after Chávez's failed coup in 1992. They might also choose to reflect, however, on rising prices, one of the main motivating factors behind protests then and now. The response by the security forces to the protests now has been far more measured than then, when hundreds, perhaps thousands, lost their lives, but there are splits within the Bolivarian Revolution over the toughness of the response.

José Vielma Mora, the governor of the western state of Táchira, one of the worst affected by the protests (a statue of Chávez was decapitated on 26 February), told a Caracas radio programme on 24 February that he opposed the "excessive" militarisation of his state ordered by the central government to stifle the protests at all costs. Vielma Mora, one of the army officers who participated in the 1992 coup alongside Chávez, and an oxymoronic conservative *Chavista* who headed the tax agency (Seniat) between 2000 and 2008, also criticised the country's economic problems and the arrest of opposition figurehead, Leopoldo López, who is being held in solitary confinement in a military prison.

Maduro is yet to respond to this internal dissent but Chávez would have ostracised Vielma Mora notwithstanding their past ties (just as he did [Ret.] General Raúl Isaías Baduel who was imprisoned for eight years in 2010). During a long press conference with the international media on 21 February Maduro said that he was investigating whether sectors of his government were behind the protests in light of evidence showing members of the intelligence agency (Sebin) firing shots towards protesters in Caracas on 12 February, disobeying his express orders not to take to the streets. Five Sebin members were arrested on 26 February on murder charges related to the shooting of two protesters that day.

Maduro's actions are looking incongruous. On the one hand, he called on the national assembly this week to form a truth commission to investigate the violent protests and find proof of a coup conspiracy; on the other hand, he has belittled the protests, saying they are taking place in just 18 of 335 municipalities nationwide. On the one hand, he expelled three US diplomats after the violent protest on 12 February for allegedly fomenting the protests; on the other hand, he named a new ambassador to the US, Maximilian Sánchez Arveláiz, on 25 February. On the same day the US expelled three Venezuelan diplomats in a tit-for-tat response to Maduro's expulsion of its personnel.

Peace conference

Although the opposition MUD declined to attend President Maduro's 'peace conference', other groups with which the government has had very difficult relations did attend. Jorge Roig, the head of Fedecámaras, told Maduro during the event, which was broadcast to the nation, that "Our country is not well, Mr President". Roig said Fedecámaras had "profound differences with your economic and political system, but democracy allows us to express these [...] at an event like this". Still, he said the business community was ready to "turn the page" and had no desire "to replace any government". He added that dialogue could not just be "a photo opportunity or an event like this" but needed to continue after the conference.

Maduro said he hoped Sánchez Arveláiz, a former ambassador to Brazil and presidential commissioner for international affairs since June 2013, would have his credentials accepted as Venezuela needed to inform US citizens of what was really happening in the country. Jaua said that US interference in Venezuela's affairs was "public and notorious" but he trusted it would "rectify" its attitude. A US State Department representative said that the US government wanted to see "seriousness" and "positive steps" before the exchange of ambassadors could be possible (the two countries have not enjoyed diplomatic relations at an ambassadorial level since 2010). The perplexing timing of Maduro's overtures explains why the US might doubt his sincerity or indeed wonder whether he simply needs fresh US diplomatic personnel to expel.

Perhaps the biggest incongruity, however, is the call for dialogue while only really being interested in monologue. In fairness Maduro is not alone in this regard. The leader of the opposition, Henrique Capriles Radonski, insisted this week that the position of the opposition Mesa de Unidad Democrática (MUD) was not "intransigent" and that he was "ready to speak to the devil or go to hell" – just not right now. Capriles opted against attending a meeting of governors with Maduro on 24 February, arguing that it was not the time to be discussing administrative matters. He also declined to attend a 'peace conference' (see sidebar) organised by Maduro at the Miraflores palace on 26 February, with different sectors of society. The MUD issued a statement calling the conference "improvised" and "a simulation of dialogue" at a time when "a rhetorical tournament" was inappropriate. Capriles published '10 proposals to advance', ranging from releasing imprisoned students to disarming paramilitaries, and appointing a mediator (he proposes the Roman Catholic Church) for talks.

COLOMBIA | POLITICS

Santos tries to get off the back foot

President Juan Manuel Santos sought to regain the initiative this week ahead of his re-election bid on 25 May. In the midst of yet another spying scandal, this time the interception of his personal emails, Santos named Germán Vargas Lleras to be his running mate. Vargas Lleras, the leader of Cambio Radical (CR), one of the three parties in the ruling Unidad Nacional coalition, would be an atypical vice-president; more of a successor-in-waiting than the usual powerless figurehead. Santos said he wanted a "different and active" vice-president. Given that Vargas Lleras is currently more popular than Santos is, the appointment should give his re-election bid a boost, winning over some of the many voters who say they will cast blank ballots.

There had been speculation in the press that Santos would name the former police chief, Óscar Naranjo, as his running mate but he said that he had chosen Vargas Lleras because they had a relationship based on "loyalty and honesty". Vargas Lleras, for instance, has expressed his scepticism about the peace talks with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Farc) in Cuba candidly but says he respects Santos's decision and would be the first to strive to implement any deal that might be struck.

The other two parties in the ruling coalition largely buried their enmity and expressed their support for Santos's choice. The president of congress, Juan Fernando Cristo, of the Partido Liberal (PL), said it showed "coherence and consistency", the hallmarks of the coalition. The secretary general of the Partido de la U (PU), Sergio Díaz Granados, said Vargas Lleras would be "good company on the presidential campaign", although PU Senator Armando Benedetti *tweeted* that "we'll have to swallow this bitter pill".

PCC plans audacious prison break

A team of 15 special operations commandos, including six snipers, have positioned themselves around the perimeter of the President Venceslau penitentiary, in the interior of São Paulo state, following a tip-off that the powerful drug gang, the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) is about to launch an audacious attempt to free four of its leaders.

Brazil's public ministry and department of corrections revealed to the local press on 26 February their investigation into the planned jailbreak. According to the ministry, for the past eight months the PCC has been working on a plan to free four of its leaders: Marco Camacho (known as 'Marcola'); Cláudio Barbará da Silva, ('Barbará'); Luiz Eduardo de Barros, ('Du Bela Vista'); and Célio Marcelo da Silva ('Bin Laden'). Apparently the four men were to make their way to an uncovered part of the prison where they would be hoisted aboard a helicopter, flown to Paraná, then on to another airport, and finally, Paraguay.

Three PCC members had been taking flying lessons in preparation. However, they had faced a number of setbacks, among them the difficulty of learning to fly different aircraft, and then the arrest of their teacher, Alexandre José de Oliveira Junior. De Oliveira was one of the pilots of the helicopter belonging to federal deputy Gustavo Perrella. A police search of that aircraft in November last year discovered 450kg of cocaine.

The plan, reportedly uncovered by wiretaps, is remarkably similar to one successfully executed by the Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (FPMR), which managed to free four of its leaders from a high security prison in Santiago, Chile, in 1996. Earlier this month, in one of the phone calls monitored by investigators, 'Bin Laden' was recorded as saying, "in a few days...we'll be dead, on the street or in BIG (the Presidente Bernandes penitentiary)". It is worth noting, however, that gang leaders in prison are often aware their phones are tapped; occasionally their conversations are actually designed for police consumption.

BIG is one of the few federal prisons which implements the Regime Disciplinar Diferenciado (RDD), the tough, effectively solitary-confinement conditions that the PCC has been fighting against. In October last year, Brazilian authorities released a recording of a phone conversation between PCC members in which they threatened to attack targets during the World Cup, if they were subjected to RDD conditions.

The PCC is Brazil's largest criminal organisation. According to a report released last year by São Paulo state's public ministry, the group has 8,000 members in São Paulo alone (around 6,000 of whom are in jail); another 4,000 across the country, and representatives in Bolivia and Paraguay. The report estimates the PCC earns US\$55m a year, made up of a monthly income of around US\$3.5m from drug trafficking and US\$1m from members' contributions.

Growth better than expected

Data released this week by the national statistics institute (Ibge) showed that growth in the final quarter of 2013 was up 0.7% on the previous quarter and 1.9% up on the same quarter of 2012. With this result, GDP growth in 2013 totalled 2.3%. According to Ibge the stellar performer was agriculture, which grew 7%. Services grew 2% and industry closed the year up 1.3%. Brazil's GDP per capita in 2013 was R\$24,065 (US\$10,200), an increase of 1.4% on 2012.

The latest growth figures are a boost for President Dilma Rousseff, and her beleaguered finance minister Guido Mantega, and follow the news on 26 February that the central bank has raised interest rates again, to 10.75%. Though the increase, of a quarter of a percentage point, is lower than the half-percentage point hikes of recent months, it still marks the eighth straight Selic increase.

T-shirt row

German sportswear company Adidas agreed to stop selling two T-shirts months ahead of the World Cup in Brazil after the government complained that they associated the country with sexual tourism. In a burst of Twitter messages on the subject, President Dilma Rousseff wrote, "Brazil is happy to receive tourists for the World Cup, but it is also ready to combat sex tourism".

Enthusiasm for World Cup and protests on the slide

A poll released by Datafolha on 24 February showed that support for both the World Cup, and the continuing protests, is falling steadily. Only 52% of the 2,614 Brazilians sampled for the survey declared themselves in favour of the event, which is due to start on 12 June. Asked the same question by the same polling company in November 2008, 79% of Brazilians were in favour; in June last year, just before the protest movement took off, 65% welcomed the tournament. Not only is the mention of the World Cup eliciting disillusionment, it is also provoking outright hostility. Opposition to the event is up to 38%, from 10% in November 2008 and 26% in June 2013.

The worry for the government is how this resentment might affect the chances of President Dilma Rousseff being re-elected in October. Another study carried out this week, by the pollsters CNT/MDA, found that 75.8% of respondents thought the projects carried out by the government to facilitate the hosting of the tournament were "unnecessary". A further 80.2% thought the money spent on stadiums should have been invested in other areas. On the plus side for the government, at least, is the fact that support for the protests has declined significantly. Only 52% are in favour of the demonstrations, down from 77% in August last year.

So far, however, concerns over the World Cup and the protests have not eaten into Rousseff's poll lead. Another survey by Datafolha, this time for *Folha de São Paulo*, found the president's position stable, at 47% support, within the margin of error for a first-round victory. Second in this scenario was Aécio Neves, of the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB) on 17%; followed by Eduardo Campos, of the Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB) on 12%.

Interestingly, neither the 'mensalão mineiro', a corruption scandal implicating the PSDB; nor the arrival of Marina Silva, a charismatic former environment minister, in the Campos camp, appears to have made much difference to the polls. Datafolha also ran the scenario of putting Silva at the head of the PSB ticket; they found she won 23% of voter intentions. Replacing Rousseff with Lula, the polling company found the former president would win comfortably in the first round, with 54%. Barring an act of God, or a serious collapse in her poll ratings, the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) will not want to switch horses. Lula, however, has already made it clear he is thinking about re-election in 2018.

Brazil 'could' be self-sufficient in oil in 2015

On 26 February the president of the state-controlled oil company Petrobras, Maria das Graças Silva Foster, said that in 2015 Brazil could recover its self-sufficiency in oil production. Between 2006 and 2011, Brazil's production did match its consumption, and Petrobras had initially indicated it would do so again in 2013.

Oil production between 2013 and 2020 is expected to average 2.9m bpd, but by 2020 Brazil should produce 3.7m bpd, according to Foster. Average production in 2013 was 1.9m bpd, a fall of 2% on 2012, caused mainly by the delay in starting operations on a number of oil rigs. But according to Foster, Petrobras' drilling for oil last year had a 75% success rate, far above the global average of between 30% to 35%.

Foster's comments follow Petrobras' announcement of a fall in profits of 19% year-on-year for the fourth quarter of 2013, to R\$6.3bn (US\$2.7bn). The state oil company is to cut its investment plan from now until 2018 by 6.8%, to US\$220.6bn. Petrobras slashed planned investment in its unprofitable refining division even more to US\$38.7bn, from US\$64.8bn previously, as it moves to concentrate on the more profitable upstream sector. It will spend US\$153.9bn in exploration and production to 2018, up from the US\$147.5bn previously planned. The firm increased domestic petrol and diesel prices by 4% and 8% respectively in late November 2013, the second increase in nine months, as it seeks to bridge the gap between global and domestic prices.

Mantega criticised

Most of the Brazilian press chose to paraphrase an editorial column in Britain's *Financial Times* which was highly critical of the beleaguered finance minister, Guido Mantega. According to the piece, Mantega has lost the faith of the international investment community. It argued Brazil's credibility could only be restored by his dismissal. So many times has Rousseff defended Mantega, whose tricky accounting techniques have irked foreign investors, that she cannot credibly dismiss him before the election. It is, however, hard to see how he would stay in that position in her second term of office.

Repsol deal key to further investment in Vaca Muerta

With the settlement reached with the Spanish oil company Repsol, Argentina has removed one obstacle in its way to attract foreign investment in its potentially vast shale oil and gas field at the Vaca Muerta formation. The agreement is yet another step towards Argentina's rapprochement with the international community, with the US State Department describing it as a "positive step".

Repsol has agreed to accept US\$5bn in compensation for the 2012 expropriation of its shares in the Argentine state oil company, Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF), less than the US\$10.5bn it originally demanded, but probably more than what it could get after covering the costs of a lengthy legal battle. In exchange Repsol will drop all legal action against Argentina, and it is free to hold on to, or sell, its remaining 12% YPF shareholding. Antonio Brufau, the Repsol chairman, declared himself "satisfied" with the deal and hinted at a possible sale of its remaining assets. "We no longer have any legal constraints to keep the remaining 12% stake in YPF", he said. "Therefore we'll look into all available options".

Argentina needs foreign investment to develop its Vaca Muerta oil and shale gas reservoir in the province of Neuquén. Shortly before the expropriation of 51% of its shares, Repsol announced the reservoir contained 22.5bn barrels of oil. Whether Repsol stays or the government manages to find a new investor, the challenges of operating in Argentina remain considerable. Factoring in inflation, which ran at close to 30% in 2013; the continued volatility of the peso; and the difficulty of drilling in the formation, the cost of developing a well in Vaca Muerta is estimated to be between US\$8m to US\$10m. A similar well in the US would cost between US\$2m to US\$3m.

President Cristina Fernández had ordered the expropriation of Repsol's assets in a bid to halt a steady decline in production. Natural gas production has been falling since 2004; oil production since 1998, forcing Argentina to import more hydrocarbons. Such costly measures have eaten into the country's dwindling supply of foreign reserves. But two years on from the expropriation, production continues to decline, as conventional oil and gas fields run dry. Without the expertise to develop the non-conventional reserves, and no foreign companies willing to invest, the potential of the Vaca Muerta has remained largely untapped.

Speaking with *Reuters*, the former energy secretary and current president of the Mosconi energy institute, Jorge Lapeña, said, "In my opinion, the deal with Repsol was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to stimulate an investment boom. For this it is necessary that the country has a long-term energy policy". YPF has signed a deal with the US oil giant, Chevron, to develop one part of the formation, in an investment worth US\$1.2bn; and another with US company Dow Chemical, worth US\$120m to help extract shale gas. However, this piecemeal approach has been heavily criticised by energy analysts.

The Vaca Muerta formation is around 30,000 square kilometres, and YPF has rights to drill in 40% of the area. Other companies, such as ExxonMobil, Total and Royal Dutch Shell do operate there, however, though on a much smaller scale. The settlement with Repsol has already provided the Argentine government with some rewards. During the course of the three-month negotiation over the final fee, Argentina signed a deal with Malaysia's state oil company, Petronas, to jointly develop shale oil in Vaca Muerta.

Fernández a no-show

Contrary to expectations, President Cristina Fernández did not attend a rally in Buenos Aires on 25 February. She was due to inspect the 25 new train carriages the government has bought from China to modernise its Sarmiento railway line. Cabinet chief Jorge Capitanich went in her place. The Sarmiento line service has been put under the spotlight mainly since February 2012 when a train crashed into the Buenos Aires City station, Once, killing 51 people and injuring hundreds.

UN criticism

Last year United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism, Ben Emmerson, paid a 14-day visit to Chile where he criticised the State for its handling of the Mapuche issue. He singled out the use of the anti-terrorism legislation, which he said had “been used in a manner that discriminates against the Mapuche [...] it has been applied in a confused and arbitrary fashion that has resulted in real injustice, has undermined the right to a fair trial, and has been perceived as stigmatising and delegitimising the Mapuche land claims and protests”. Emmerson also attributed the “extremely volatile” situation in the regions of Biobío and Araucanía, which he visited, to “the misuse of the counter-terrorism legislation” in the context of what he described as “an inexcusably slow process of ancestral land repatriation”.

Mapuche conviction throws up questions for Bachelet

Last week a local court found an activist of the indigenous Mapuche guilty of the murder of a retired couple in January 2013, in the southern Araucanía region, where the Mapuche lays claim to ancestral lands. The attack had sparked violent unrest [WR-13- 01]. While stopping short of finding the attack a terrorist act - as requested by the government of President Sebastián Piñera - the court ruling has focused attention back onto the Mapuche issue and renewed calls from civil society groups, like Centro de Investigación y Defensa Sur, for President-elect Michelle Bachelet, who takes office on 11 March, to revoke the anti-terrorism legislation altogether.

On 20 February, the court in Temuco, Araucanía’s capital, found Celestino Córdova guilty of the murders of Werner Luchsinger, a landowner and wealthy forestry businessman, and his wife Vivianne McKay [WR-13- 01]. With Córdova due to be sentenced on 28 February, the court’s decision not to find him guilty of terrorism, which, as per a law dating back to the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990) would have resulted in higher penalties, was nonetheless a setback to the Piñera government.

The Chilean government came in for criticism from the UN last year vis-à-vis the Mapuche issue as well as the anti-terrorism law (*see sidebar*). The latest case has again focused attention on Bachelet’s pledges regarding both issues, neither of which receive much coverage in her manifesto. As regards the anti-terrorism law, Bachelet pledges to both refrain from applying it to indigenous groups lobbying for “social demands” and to modify it to bring it into line with “international standards”. Her pick for the interior portfolio, Rodrigo Peñailillo, has already indicated the future government’s intention of sticking to this line – a position which has met with criticism from President Piñera. On 24 February, following his first meeting with current Interior Minister Andrés Chadwick as part of the transition of power, Peñailillo told reporters that “we believe that the anti-terrorist law is not there to resolve the country’s social conflicts”, adding that “the law as it stands in Chile has the necessary force to resolve, investigate and sanction” in relation to the indigenous conflict.

Bachelet is promising to establish a commission of representatives from “Chilean society and the indigenous sector” tasked with investigating complaints of violence and police abuse against indigenous communities, particularly those affected by tension in Araucanía. Her manifesto states that within six months of its establishment, the commission will present recommendations to the government to address these complaints.

New row with Peru

The first meeting of technical delegations from Peru and Chile took place on 17 February in the Chilean town of Valparaíso to implement the accord struck by both countries 11 days earlier to establish the exact coordinates of the new maritime boundary set by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) [WR-14-04]. Headed up by Chile’s ambassador to Peru, Patricio Pozo Ruiz, and Peru’s border director, Manuel de Cossío Kluver, the two sides agreed on key points necessary for the process of determining the new boundary: technical details; logistics; methodology; and flights to carry out aerial surveys. Those present also scheduled three further follow-up meetings – one in Arica, Chile on 12 March, one in Ilo, Peru on 19 March and a final one scheduled to take place in Lima on 24 March.

These signs of cooperation, however, come amid a diplomatic row after the Peruvian government published a map showing a small 3.7 hectare triangle of land, upon which a border marker sits, as Peruvian territory, prompting Chile’s foreign minister Alfredo Moreno to announce on 12 February that his government would send an official protest note.

'El Chapo' arrest puts Peña Nieto in awkward position**Closing in on El Chapo**

According to Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam, last week Guzmán had been tracked to a house in Culiacán, Sinaloa's capital, but he managed to escape a 17 February raid through an underground tunnel. Guzmán then made a phone call to his associates, requesting assistance to escape the city. That call was intercepted by the security forces leading them to Guzmán's hideout in Mazatlán.

Mexican security forces landed the heaviest blow to drug-trafficking in the country in decades this week after catching the biggest fish in the drug underworld, Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán Loera, head of the Sinaloa/Pacífico drug-trafficking organisation (DTO), considered to be the largest and most powerful criminal organisation in the Western Hemisphere. While such a coup has (rightly) earned the government of President Enrique Peña Nieto high praise from its key security ally - the US - Guzmán's fate has become a delicate bilateral issue, with both countries keen to have him prosecuted by their respective judicial systems.

Early on 22 February Mexico's navy announced the arrest of Guzmán, the most wanted criminal in both Mexico and the US, who had managed to evade capture for over 10 years after famously escaping from a Mexican maximum security prison in 2001. Since then Guzmán has acquired an almost mythical status as he appeared to outsmart the authorities on both sides of the border, leading to all sorts of speculation about his whereabouts. In the end, he was found hiding in a condominium in the coastal city of Mazatlán, in his native Sinaloa state.

A statement by the Mexican navy said that Guzmán's capture was the result of a successful operation (codenamed 'Gárgola') carried out by an elite navy unit acting on intelligence provided by US law enforcement agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). This is highly significant given that when Peña Nieto came to power in December 2012, he announced that he would limit the level of direct US involvement in security operations in Mexico in contrast to what was permitted by his predecessor, Felipe Calderón (2006-2012). The US expressed concerns that this could hamper bilateral security efforts. Guzmán's arrest in an operation solely executed by Mexican agents provides the Peña Nieto government with exactly the sort of evidence it needs to argue the contrary.

It is perhaps worth noting that as has often been the case since Peña Nieto took office, the success came with almost impeccable timing, just days after Peña Nieto hosted Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper and US President Barack Obama at the North American Leaders Summit held in Toluca, Estado de México [WR-14-07]. In fact Mexico's attorney general, Jesús Murillo Karam, has revealed that Guzmán had almost been caught just as Peña Nieto was discussing increasing cooperation with his counterparts in Toluca (*see sidebar*). News of the capture was immediately hailed on both sides of the border. In Mexico, where many commentators have long argued that Guzmán's ability to evade capture owed to the fact that he had struck deals with past and present government officials, allowing his Sinaloa DTO to be left alone as long as it kept a lower profile than some of the other more violent and aggressive criminal organisations operating in Mexico, Peña Nieto's detractors were left with no choice but to applaud his government for the highly symbolic capture.

US declaration of intent

Over in the US, the Obama administration also commended the Peña Nieto government. US Attorney General Eric Holder issued a statement congratulating Mexico's security forces and the Peña Nieto government for what it described as "an historic achievement for Mexico and a victory for the people of Mexico and the United States". Holder added that he was "satisfied" that the US had been able to work efficiently with Mexico on the capture.

Complex legal scenario

On 25 February a district court in Estado de México threw out some of the drug-trafficking charges presented against Guzmán (on the grounds that his criminal responsibility for these cannot be proven); but admitted the organised crime charges presented against him. Guzmán must now be tried by the court on these charges, while Mexico's attorney general's office prepares itself to present even more charges. All this makes Guzmán's extradition more difficult as cases brought against him in the jurisdiction in which he was detained would take precedence. In fact, on the same day, a Mexico City district court awarded Guzmán a legal reprieve presented by his lawyers under Mexico's 'Ley de Amparo', which prevents him from being extradited while on trial in Mexico.

But the Obama administration's praise contrasted with the reaction of others in the US, who immediately called for Guzmán to be extradited so that he could face the battery of outstanding drug-trafficking-related charges presented against him in the US. The first to demand this was Michael McCaul (R, Texas), the chairman of the House of Representatives' Homeland Security Committee. Recalling that Guzmán's 2001 jailbreak came just as Mexico's courts were analysing a US extradition request, McCaul urged the Obama administration to waste no time to push the Peña Nieto government on the extradition issue this time. "It is the best option for both Mexico and the US," McCaul said, arguing that it was the best way to "ensure that what happened in 2001 does not happen again".

Immediately afterwards, US Attorney General for the Eastern District of New York Loretta Lynch announced her intention to request Guzmán's extradition. This is something to which the Peña Nieto government is bound to devote considerable thought. For one thing, just as capturing Guzmán provided a boost for Mexican law enforcement and the Peña Nieto government's security strategy, trying Guzmán in the local courts would provide a much-needed credibility boost for the discredited Mexican judicial system.

Pointedly, following the US's declaration of intent, Mexico's interior minister, Miguel Angel Osorio Chong, said on 24 February that if an extradition request is presented, it would be immediately but carefully analysed by the Peña Nieto government. "Our institutions need to work with him, I mean that he needs to testify in order for us to continue fighting insecurity," Osorio Chong explained. In fact, the Mexican authorities have moved quickly to prosecute Guzmán, swiftly taking him to the Altiplano maximum security prison in the Estado de México, where he gave preliminary statements before appearing in front of a judge who notified him that he still had to complete the remaining four years of his original 12-year prison sentence and face trial for a series of additional charges levelled against him. Ultimately the decision whether to extradite Guzmán or not will be resolved by the Mexican courts and these are already giving signs that they may not quickly allow this (*see sidebar*).

Counterproductive push for extradition

With Mexico appearing reluctant just to hand over Guzmán, two former DEA agents publicly expressed concerns that Guzmán may never be extradited and could be allowed to escape from prison once again. In interviews with US media, Héctor Berrélez, who headed up a DEA special unit in Mexico, and Phil Jordan, the former director of the DEA in El Paso, Texas, said that they believed that Guzmán's arrest was part of a deal struck with the Peña Nieto government that would prevent his extradition. Jordan went even further and said that US intelligence had evidence that Guzmán had "put a lot of money in Peña Nieto's [electoral] campaign" and that he believed that if he was not extradited immediately, he would eventually be released by the Mexican authorities.

The comments by Berrélez and Jordan were rejected by the US government, with the DEA, the US State Department and the US embassy in Mexico all issuing statements denying that these reflected any official view. Nonetheless, the incendiary comments prompted a reaction from the Peña Nieto government.

On 25 February the government spokesman, Eduardo Sánchez, dismissed the allegations as "ludicrous" in a radio interview. "I don't know what reasons these people have to make such a serious accusation without any proof [...] I'm not going to speculate on that but I will say that we categorically and strongly reject them," Sánchez said. He refused to comment on Guzmán's possible extradition but said that the Peña Nieto administration "guarantees" that he would not be allowed to escape prison again. Sánchez's remarks show just how sensitive the issue is for the Peña Nieto government; and that it will not accept any attempt to pressure it into extraditing Guzmán.

FMLN closes in on presidency

Facundo Guardado

Facundo Guardado was one of the commanders of the political commission (CP) of the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL), the oldest, and most belligerent, of the five guerrilla groups that used to make up the FMLN in 1980. His *nom de guerre* was Esteban Cabrales. He represented the reformist wing of the FMLN after the peace accords were signed in 1992 and it became a political party. He ran for president in 1999 for the FMLN but fell out with the more 'orthodox' Marxist wing of the party, led by the late Schafik Handal. In 2003 Guardado left the party and founded the Movimiento Renovador (MR), which disappeared after the elections a year later.

Victory is within sight for Salvador Sánchez Cerén. The presidential candidate for the left-wing Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) is heading into the second round of elections on 9 March having increased the lead he established over Norman Quijano, his rival from the right-wing Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Arena), in the first round, according to six opinion polls published over the last week. In a final roll of the dice Quijano has distanced himself from Arena by disowning his ex-campaign adviser, former president Francisco Flores (1999-2004), who is being investigated for corruption; and announcing a moderate left-winger and former FMLN presidential candidate as an adviser and future cabinet minister.

Sánchez Cerén held a 14-percentage-point lead (49.5%-35.4%) over Quijano in a poll by the Instituto Universitario de la Opinión Pública (Iudop), of the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), more than his 10-point lead from the first round. A CID-Gallup poll showed Sánchez Cerén with an even bigger lead of 58% to 42%. A poll by LPG Datos for the national daily *La Prensa Gráfica* predicted a 57%-43% win for Sánchez Cerén.

The Centro de Estudios Ciudadanos (CEC), of the Universidad Francisco Gavidia, gave Sánchez Cerén a 53.9%-35.5% lead and actually revealed that a slightly greater number of those voters who backed former president Tony Saca (2004-2009), of the Movimiento de Unidad, in the first round would go to Sánchez Cerén rather than to Quijano (34.5%-26.2%). Saca won 11% in the first round and to have any chance in the run-off, Quijano needs to win the bulk of this support and persuade the sizeable number of Salvadoreans who abstained in the first round to back him.

Quijano is trying everything to bridge the gap. Firstly, he publicly repudiated Flores. He announced that he had sent a petition to Arena's ethics tribunal calling for Flores to be expelled from the party. Flores was one of Quijano's principal campaign advisers but in recent months he became entangled in a corruption scandal involving donations from Taiwan, which came to a head in January, damaging Arena's credibility. Flores did a good job of incriminating himself during his two appearances before a special commission of the legislative assembly looking into the Taiwanese donations [WR-14-02]. The commission presented its final 130-page report to the full assembly on 25 February: it recommended that the attorney general's office investigate Flores for bribery; illicit negotiations; embezzlement; money and asset laundering; and false testimony related to the "non traditional" donations. Conscious that the scandal has undermined his candidacy, Quijano determined to distance himself decisively from Flores, and indirectly the Arena old guard, by showing his zero tolerance for corruption.

Secondly, Quijano said he had asked Facundo Guardado, an estranged member of the FMLN and the party's presidential candidate in 1999 (when, ironically, he lost to Flores), to join his campaign team and to serve as justice and public security minister if he comes to power. Turning to Guardado, who he said had "the gift of leadership and social sensitivity", looks like an effort by Quijano to convince voters that he is his own man and, again, to dissociate himself from the Arena old guard which the electorate so roundly rejected in the first round.

Finally, Quijano has softened his policy proposals. While Flores was his campaign adviser, he advocated a traditional *mano dura* ("firm hand") response to the *mara* gangs; with Guardado on board his focus has switched

Club de Madrid

On 20 February Cassam Uteem, the former President of Mauritius (1992-2002) and head of the Club de Madrid, an independent non-profit organization comprising more than 90 former presidents and prime ministers from 60 democratic countries, called on President Martelly and the opposition to salvage the dialogue. This followed the first mission of the Club de Madrid to Haiti which took place between 18 and 21 February and is being funded by the European Union. The delegation met President Martelly, Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe, the presidents of the senate and the chamber of deputies, Simon Dieuseul and Jacques Stevenson Thimoléon respectively, representatives from the UN stabilisation mission in Haiti (Minustah), the Episcopal Conference of Haiti and other religious organisations.

to crime prevention. He said Guardado had advised him to create a fund of at least US\$100m to invest in municipalities considered 'red zones' for violence (constructing parks, football pitches, and recreation grounds), and to improve the rehabilitation and social reinsertion of gang members.

Quijano said his government would be inclusive, with people from "all sectors of national life". He went on: "the only way to take the country forward is by forming a government [...] with a president who has the ability to cross party boundaries". This is a dramatic change from his first round campaign, which was highly confrontational and polarising, and it is doubtful whether voters, who have also seen him flip-flop on public security, will be convinced that his intentions are genuine.

Meanwhile, Sánchez Cerén has continued where he left off, and, during a radio interview last week, sought to put himself firmly in the camp of moderate left-wingers in the region by saying that he greatly admired Uruguay's President José Mujica, like him a former guerrilla. Sánchez Cerén said that if he won election he intended to continue living in his own house, like Mujica, rather than the presidential palace, although he said this would depend on whether his security advisers considered this to be safe. Either way he was adamant that he would not "live in luxury": "I don't need much comfort. Comfort discomfords me."

HAITI | POLITICS

Obama's optimism proves premature

Earlier this month President Michel Martelly met US President Barack Obama in Washington – the first meeting between the two leaders at the White House since Martelly took office in May 2011. Top of the agenda (and a major concern for the international community) was Haiti's need to stage long-overdue elections to fill a third of the 30-member senate (whose terms expired in May 2012) and dozens of local government posts. President Obama declared himself "very encouraged" vis-à-vis progress made on an election law passed last December [WR-13-50], considered essential to the electoral process. However, the subsequent breakdown of national talks between the executive and legislature (at loggerheads for most of Martelly's mandate), to finalise the deal to hold the vote, has again raised doubts as to whether these elections will take place.

President Obama's remarks, which followed the 6 February meeting between the two leaders, was prompted by talks between the main political actors in Haiti which began on 24 January and were mediated by Bishop Chibly Langlois. President Martelly's Repons Peyizan has just three seats in the 99-member lower chamber and no senate seats at all, which has resulted in repeated clashes between the two branches of government.

The subsequent refusal of the senate president, Simon Dieuseul (of the opposition Lavni), announced on 15 February, to sign the deal suggested that President Obama's optimism was premature. The main bone of contention between Dieuseul, who was subsequently backed by 11 other senators, and Martelly, was the latter's refusal to publish the names of 10 new members of the superior court of auditors, Court Supérieure des Comptes et du Contentieux Administratif (CSC/CA), which is tasked with auditing government accounts. The list of proposed officials for the court, which has been empty since July 2013, had been sent to the president by the senate back in September 2013.

Dealing a further blow to the credibility of the talks, other opposition groups like Fanmi Lavalas (the party of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide

Maritime security next on the list

The Honduran authorities and the US Southern Command estimate that 80% of the illicit drugs crossing through Honduras enter the country by sea, with the rest by land and air. In Honduras, on 11 February, the US Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, William Brownfield, said that there has been a reduction of “over 80%” in narco flights over Honduras, noting that “the entry (of the product) by sea is a greater problem and to a certain point that is the challenge for the Honduran and US governments to attack during 2014”.

(1991, 1994-1996, 2001-2004) and the smaller Fusion des Sociaux Démocrates and Kontra Pèp La (Contrat du peuple) refused to sign up to the deal, calling for greater concessions from Martelly. While barred from taking part in the last 2010 legislative elections, Fanmi Lavalas nonetheless remains influential.

Moving against Duvalier

While the breakdown in political dialogue has since attracted international concern (see sidebar), a recent ruling issued by a three-member appeals court in Port-au-Prince against former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier (1971-1986) has been hailed by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as “a landmark step for Haitian justice in combating impunity”.

Issued on 20 February the ruling found that Duvalier, who voluntarily returned to Haiti in January 2011 after 25 years of exile in France, could be charged with crimes against humanity under international law. This reversed a January 2012 decision by an investigating magistrate which had argued that the former dictator could not be charged with these crimes because a 10-year statute of limitations had expired. This, despite the fact that the OHCHR and other human rights bodies had pointed out that there is no statute of limitations under international law for serious human rights violations.

Nicole Phillips, a lawyer for the Boston-based Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), told reporters that any trial is still months away, given the appellate court’s call for further investigation, but the IJDH nonetheless said it was a “huge historical moment in Haitian history”. Reed Brody, of the New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), described it as “an important affirmation of the potential of the rule of law”. He told reporters “We’ve seen Jean-Claude Duvalier be invited to presidential events and prancing around the country as if he were a VIP rather than an accused criminal.”

HONDURAS | SECURITY

Getting drug traffickers out of the air

Just days after approval by congress of the new shutdown law giving the Honduran air force broad new powers to force down suspected narco planes, a newly constituted inter-agency force, Fuerza Interagencial de Seguridad Aeroportuaria (Fisa), on 26 February took control of the country’s four main airports - Toncontín (Tegucigalpa), Ramón Villeda Morales (San Pedro Sula), Golosón (La Ceiba) and Juan Manuel Gálvez (Roatán) - in order to guard installations and fight against drug-trafficking.

President Juan Orlando Hernández ordered the creation of the new unit in early February after Panamanian airport authorities seized eight suitcases from three Hondurans en route from Toncontín airport stuffed with almost US\$7.2m in hidden cash. The Honduran authorities suspended 25 police agents, two anti-drug agents and five security staff at Toncontín over the case.

The new Fisa unit comprises some 300 officers drawn from the national police and the army, as well as civil aviation and migration officials, the national investigative and intelligence directorate (Dirección Nacional de Investigación e Inteligencia) said in a statement. The spokesperson for the national police, Julián Hernández, told reporters that the unit would be “in charge of luggage inspections, both incoming and outgoing, and any security-related situation”.

Rubén Martell, director of the police special investigations unit (Servicios Especiales de Investigación de la Policía), said the Fisa unit would be stationed “permanently” at Honduran airports so as to “counterattack crime in its various manifestations”. He said the Fisa would carry out “monitoring, controls and inspections” to “identify and combat crime”, which suggests that it has been given a fairly broad mandate.

Quotes of the Week

“I don't know [Mauricio] Rodas, but I know the people behind him and they are counting the days for this government to fall. These people are in contact with the fascist Right in Venezuela. To work with political adversaries is one thing, but to work with enemies quite another.”

Ecuador's President Rafael Correa.

“The arrest of one of the most sought after drug-trafficking capos in the world is a credit to the efficacy of the Mexican State, but it is in no way cause for triumphalism.”

Mexico's President Enrique Peña Nieto on the capture of Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán Loera.

“I am moved every time I hear the blues [...] I think I was from Mississippi in a previous life.”

Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro on his desire to renew ties with the US.

POSTSCRIPT

'Bolivarian' presidents practice what they preach

President Evo Morales is one of the worst paid presidents in South America, according to Argentine media company *Infobae*, which this week released a selected list of presidential earnings after the Argentine government finally acceded to a freedom of information request seeking government salary information. Morales's relatively paltry US\$2,176/month is still 15 times Bolivia's minimum wage, however, and in any case Morales claims to give most of it away. Other 'Bolivarian' presidents look similarly underpaid in comparison to their 'imperial lackey' counterparts. Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro might well question whether his US\$6,000 a month is worth all the trouble. Uruguay's José Mujica, the world's 'most humble' president, gets a fairly hefty US\$12,500 a month, more than Brazil's Dilma Rousseff, but like Morales, Mujica apparently puts 90% towards government social programmes, keeping just US\$1,250 for himself. Finally, while Mexico's Enrique Peña Nieto is the best paid Latin American leader, his wage slip pales in comparison to US President Barack Obama's US\$34,000 a month. Yet even that works out at a mere US\$408,000 a year for the world's most powerful man. The Swedish football player Zlatan Ibrahimović, forward for Paris-St.Germain, earns US\$20.2m a year, *after tax*.

President	Country	US\$/month
Barack Obama	US	34,000
Enrique Peña Nieto	Mexico	20,409
Sebastian Piñera	Chile	15,042
José Mujica	Uruguay	12,500
Dilma Rousseff	Brazil	11,764
Cristina Fernández	Argentina	10,000
Juan Manuel Santos	Colombia	10,000
Horacio Cartes	Paraguay	8,587
Rafael Correa	Ecuador	7,000
Nicolás Maduro	Venezuela	6,188
Ollanta Humala	Peru	5,500
Evo Morales	Bolivia	2,176
<i>Source: Infobae.com</i>		

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