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CONTENTS

BRAZIL & SOUTHERN CONE

BRAZIL 3

Petrobras investigation moves into the political realm

BRAZIL 5

Water levels rise, and so do electricity prices

TRACKING TRENDS

ANDEAN COUNTRIES

VENEZUELA 7

López remains defiant one year on

TRACKING TRENDS

MEXICO & NAFTA

MEXICO 10

Enforced disappearances come under international scrutiny

MEXICO-US 12

Lawsuit halts Obama's immigration plan

CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

NICARAGUA 13

Strengthening ties with Moscow

TRACKING TRENDS

POSTSCRIPT 16

Uruguay's Mujica makes way for Vázquez

Quotes of the week

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'March of silence' and other Nisman-related events have major political implications

Two events in the past week have marked a watershed in the repercussions of the still unsolved death of Argentine prosecutor Alberto Nisman, who had drawn up criminal charges against President Cristina Fernández, foreign relations minister Héctor Timerman and others. On one side is the strictly legal arena, where two separate developments are taking place: the furtherance of Nisman's charges and the investigation of Nisman's death. On the other side is the laterally connected political arena, where the survival of *kirchnerismo* will be played out in the run-up to the October presidential elections.

The first of those decisive events was the 13 February decision by federal prosecutor Gerardo Pollicita, who took over Nisman's work, to file indictments against the same people targeted by Nisman for aggravated concealment (*encubrimiento*) and impeding or interfering with the fulfilment of the duties of public officials. It is now up to federal judge Daniel Rafecas, designated to take charge of this case, to determine whether there is merit in the accusation prepared by Nisman to take the case to trial. On a not entirely parallel track are the investigations into Nisman's death by his former wife, judge Sandra Arroyo Salgado, who has been accepted as a party to the case on behalf of Nisman's (and her) daughters.

The second major event was the 'march of silence' held on 18 February, organised by public prosecutors as an act of homage to Nisman and supported by a number of opposition leaders. The commitment to silence was ostensibly intended to depoliticise the march, as the politicians agreed not to address the marchers and not to display party-political banners. However, the government ensured that it would be seen as a political statement with a series of 'them and us' statements by the President, and the claim by top officials that the event was an attempt at a "judicial coup". This was exacerbated by reports of attempts to intimidate judges and prosecutors with hints that their jobs would be jeopardised by taking part in the march.

As the day of the march — 18F in the acronym that the media made almost universal — drew close, the government began to tone down its rhetoric. Cabinet chief Jorge Capitanich said at a press conference, "In Argentina there is full freedom of expression and assembly." Aníbal Fernández, who as secretary-general of the presidency is meant to be the government's chief spokesman, told a radio interviewer that he would take part in the march were it not for the fact that his high political profile would make his attendance be seen as a "provocation".

“Pundits are already speculating about the impact this will have on the run-up to the elections, but few are venturing that what brought leading opposition presidential aspirants together for the non-partisan 18F will keep them together when it comes to joining force against the *kirchneristas*.”

An attempt was made to upstage the march by organising, for earlier on 18F, a rally of the pro-government faithful which would be addressed by the President. The chosen venue was the Atucha II nuclear power plant in Zárate, some 115km north of Buenos Aires; the occasion was its having reached full operating capacity. It is not clear how many supporters were ferried there, but the organisers had let it be known that from 10 a.m. some 30,000 *empanadas*, and grilled hamburgers and *chorizos* would be provided free, against the backdrop of live music.

President Fernández devoted her speech mainly to sing the praises of Argentina’s nuclear achievements. The only oblique reference to the ‘march of silence’ was her proclamation that “nobody is going to demarcate the playing field for us”.

The 18F march in Buenos Aires was attended in the evening by thousands who braved two hours of constant rain — the actual counts ranged from 50,000 (federal security forces) to 400,000 (metropolitan police), with the newspaper *La Nación* calculating a more modest 350,000. There were simultaneous marches in three major cities in the province of Buenos Aires (La Plata, Bahía Blanca and Mar del Plata) and in seven provinces (Córdoba, Mendoza, Santa Fe, Misiones, Entre Ríos, Santiago del Estero and Santa Cruz), with “multitudinous” attendance reported in Rosario, Santa Fe city, Mar del Plata and Córdoba city.

The commitment to silence was not observed throughout: there were sporadic outbreaks of chanting slogans like ‘Justice’, ‘Nisman present’, ‘Argentina’ and ‘Long live the Fatherland’, and attempts to sing the national anthem.

Pundits are already speculating about the impact this will have on the run-up to the elections, but few are venturing that what brought leading opposition presidential aspirants together for the non-partisan 18F will keep them together when it comes to joining force against the *kirchneristas*.

The prosecution of Nisman’s accusations is not certain. Awaiting judge Rafecas was a document with the opinion of the treasury procurator’s office, signed by Angelina Abbona, Horacio Diez and Javier Pargament, which dismisses the “clues” cited by Nisman as “lacking the entity to constitute an indication of criminal actions”.

The investigation into Nisman’s death has continued to be muddied by the blow-by-blow revelations of prosecutor Viviana Fein, and the appearance in the media of the testimony of a woman conscripted as an “uninvolved witness” to the initial proceedings in Nisman’s apartment which, if corroborated, would cast doubts on the integrity with which evidence was collected.

The prosecution of the underlying AMIA bombing case has been entrusted by procurator-general Alejandra Gils Carbó — the head of the public prosecution service widely considered to be ‘close to’ the government — to a team of three prosecutors whose work will be coordinated by Juan Murray.

As to the government’s talk about an opposition attempt to stage a “judicial coup”, recent developments have brought back to the fore the claims by the opposition that the government has itself been hard at work attempting to rig the judicial system. This is seen as taking place through the appointment of members of the militant *kirchnerista* group known as La Cámpora and associates of economy minister Axel Kicillof to control positions in a number of key institutions with quasi-judicial oversight functions. All of these will hold their positions at least until November 2015, and some of longer tenure. Together they have the wherewithal to act against those cabinet chief Capitanich recently described as a business-backed opposition attempt to stage a “market coup”.

Government bound to lose veto

The new president of the lower chamber of congress, Eduardo Cunha, a disaffected member of the government-allied Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB), promised to put to vote the presidential veto on tax band adjustments next week. In effect, this would revoke the veto issued by President Dilma Rousseff early this year over the readjustment of tax bands by 6.5%, which had been approved by both chambers of congress in December last year. Rousseff is reportedly prepared to offer a smaller readjustment rate of 4.5% to save face, but even allied congressmen said it was unlikely that this would be acceptable judging by the rebellious climate in congress.

BRAZIL & SOUTHERN CONE

BRAZIL | POLITICS

Petrobras investigation moves into the political realm

The ongoing investigation into an alleged bribery scheme in the state oil company Petrobras has moved firmly into the political realm with Justice Minister Jose Eduardo Cardozo now under fire over reports that he held private meetings with legal representatives of construction companies accused of colluding to overpay on contracts. According to reports, Cardozo provided the accused with assurances that the ongoing federal police inquiry would also implicate opposition members, leaving the government led by President Dilma Rousseff better placed to negotiate the future direction of the investigation, ostensibly to limit the damage it could cause for both sides and, therefore, to construction bosses themselves.

According to the latest edition of the current affairs magazine *Veja*, Cardozo met Sergio Renault, a legal representative of UTC, one of the construction companies implicated in the corruption scheme at Petrobras. In the meeting Cardozo reportedly assured Renault that his boss had nothing to fear since the police investigations would also implicate important members of the opposition in the bribery scheme. According to the same reports, Cardozo expected the opposition would reach political agreement to narrow the scope of investigations and, crucially, put pressure on the judiciary to be lenient with construction bosses.

At first, Cardozo denied having met Renault. But when it became clear that Renault had been at the ministry and that Cardozo had also met with lawyers of two other companies, Camargo Corrêa and Odebrecht, he changed his story. While he refused to divulge what had been discussed, Cardozo maintained that there was nothing strange in the fact that he had met the lawyers, claiming that he even had a “duty” to do so.

Jurists, however, saw the meetings differently, with the former president of Brazil’s supreme court (2012-2014), Joaquim Barbosa, *tweeting* on 14 February that Cardozo should be sacked. For Barbosa, the Petrobras corruption case should be left for jurists to decide and not politicians. Barbosa was responsible for the conviction for bribery of leaders of the ruling Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in the cash-for-votes scandal, known as the *mensalão* in 2013. The alleged corruption scheme in Petrobras has resurrected the previous scandal, with witnesses now claiming that part of the bribery money was used to pay for the PT’s campaigns illegally.

Indeed, the PT’s treasurer, João Vaccari Neto, was obliged to make a statement to the federal police in early February denying any wrongdoing, but his visit to the police station alarmed his political colleagues in Brasília as it suggested that the police was closing in on politicians who benefitted from the scheme, both from the PT and its allies, but also the opposition.

This fear seemed to have been confirmed by the judge responsible for handling the Petrobras inquiry, Sergio Moro, when he ordered the arrest, on 18 February, of construction bosses claiming that their lawyers had sought out Cardozo with the intention of “obtaining political privileges” in the ongoing proceedings, which in his view is a crime for “attempting to put public order at risk.” In his declaration to the press after he issued the arrest order, Moro confirmed that apart from directors of Petrobras, the police investigations also revealed that “part of the bribes was paid to political agents and politicians, perverting democracy.”

Controversial theme wins Rio's Carnival parade

Samba school Beija-Floor won this year's Carnival parade in Rio de Janeiro with a controversial theme paying homage to Equatorial Guinea. According to local reports, the African country's government paid R\$10m (US\$3.5m) to finance Beija-Floor. The school had as its guest of honour in the Sambadrome, Teodoro Nguema Obiang, the son of Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang, who seized power in a military coup in 1979.

Moro went on to say that "it is not only one or two congressmen, but tens" who are implicated in the corruption scheme. However, he refused to comment further or give names, claiming that such crimes fall under the federal court's jurisdiction. Serving politicians have judicial privileges in Brazil and only supreme court judges can oversee proceedings against them.

Moro also refused to criticise Cardozo, saying that "this would not be appropriate, not least because it is outside my jurisdiction, but also because there are no reports or proof that the justice minister accepted any request" from the lawyers. Still, the arrest order forced Cardozo to issue an official statement underlining that he had not "at any moment, received requests" from lawyers to create obstacles in the investigation or to act in favour of construction bosses in legal proceedings.

Curiously, just after the meetings in the ministry took place, construction bosses who were in plea bargain negotiations with judges stopped cooperating with the federal police investigators. These included Renault's boss, UTC chairman Ricardo Pessoa, who stands accused of being the main coordinator amongst Brazil's construction companies in their collusion with Petrobras executives to overpay on contracts.

Pessoa is a personal friend of former president Lula da Silva (2003-2011), but recently had started to complain that he had been left to his own devices as the police and the judiciary closed in on construction bosses. Crucially, he was giving signs he was going to crack under pressure and spell the beans over bribes paid directly to members of the PT, including some of the party's previous leadership who were condemned in the *mensalão* case, such as Lula's one time right hand man and chief of staff of the presidency, Jose Dirceu.

Dirceu is currently serving his sentence, but curiously his company JD Consultoria, was in the payroll of Engevix, one the companies accused of being involved in the illicit scheme in Petrobras. According to *Veja*, Engevix's boss, Gerson Almara, who has been under arrest for three months, confirmed that the consultancy services were a way to launder the bribery money into Dirceu's account.

Congressional inquiry

A new congressional inquiry (CPI) into the Petrobras case is set to start next week in the lower chamber of congress. This will create more difficulties for the Rousseff administration, adding to its already problematic dealings with congress at a time that some opposition leaders are agitating for her impeachment over the scandal. However, the likelihood that the federal police investigations will also implicate opposition, could allow the PT to limit some of the damage.

Furthermore, one of the names rumoured to feature on the federal police's list is that of the new president of the lower chamber, deputy Eduardo Cunha, a disaffected member of the government-allied Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB). Significantly, despite having set an agenda largely contrary to the government's interests (*see page 3 sidebar*), Cunha has positioned himself against opening any proceeding for the impeachment of Rousseff.

In any case, the PT has already gone on the offensive calling any inquiry to include the years before Lula, pointing that at least one of the witnesses in the federal police investigation, Pedro Barusco, a former Petrobras director, claimed that he started to receive bribes from construction companies in 1997, during the Partido da social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB) government of former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003). In yet another parallel with the *mensalão* case, the idea of using cash from state companies to buy support in congress also started with the PSDB.

Water levels rise, and so do electricity prices

According to the São Paulo state water utility company (Sabesp), increased rainfall is boosting reservoir levels and may prevent the extension of water rationing which is due to start in April. The rise in water reservoir levels may also help prevent further electricity blackouts, not only in the industrial hub of São Paulo but also in neighbouring states. What is certain, however, is that electricity prices will increase from as early as next month.

Following the worst drought in 84 years, rain is finally falling in the south-east region of Brazil. But while the recent rains frustrated Carnival revellers this week – and also caused flash floods and gridlock on the roads – they have helped to boost reservoir levels. According to Sabesp, the water level in the Cantareira system, the main reservoir complex supplying 6m people in São Paulo, reached 8.9% of total capacity on 17 February. The level is equal to that registered on 16 September last year.

Other reservoirs in the region also registered increases in water levels and Sabesp technicians believe that if the level in the Cantareira reaches 10% of capacity by the end of March, when the rainy seasons typically ends, the state government could call off the official start of its water rationing programme. While this was due to start on 1 April, for many in the poorer areas in the periphery of São Paulo, water shortages has already been a reality for many months. Indeed, apart from rainfall, another key factor contributing to the increase in reservoir water levels in February were limits imposed by Sabesp on water distribution. In the Cantareira system alone, the daily water volume taken out of reservoirs has fallen to 11,900 litres per second in February, from 28,600 litres per second in December.

With around 80% of Brazil's energy generated by hydroelectric power plants, the national grid operator (ONS) ordered rolling blackouts in small towns and rural areas in several states in southeast and northeast regions of Brazil, so it could supply the main cities in the region. And despite the increase in reservoir levels, analysts still believe energy rationing in Brazil's richest cities will also become inevitable in the coming months.

Electricity price increase

What is certain is that electricity prices for both residential consumers and the industry will increase in March, the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* reported. According to the newspaper, energy companies are going to put prices up next month by as much as 53% for industries in the southeast region, to R\$229 (US\$81)/MWh.

But while part of the increase stems from the cost of producing thermoelectricity to make up for the fall in cheaper power produced by hydroelectric dams, a large chunk is also expected to be used to pay for social subsidies, such as the government's Conta de Desenvolvimento Energetico (CDE), which provides low cost energy to poorer consumers in the north of Brazil. Last year, the federal government led by President Dilma Rousseff banked most of the subsidy to prevent price increases for poorer consumers, but the treasury has now indicated that the cost will now have to be met by consumers in the southeast to keep in line with the austerity measures imposed by the finance ministry.

The national association of electricity consumers (Anace), which previously forecast a 40% increase in electricity prices, has upped its forecast for March of "well above 50%", which it warns "will bankrupt industrial consumers," its president Carlos Faria told *O Estado*. The Brazilian association of large electricity consumers (Abrace) also complained that the cost difference in Brazil between industrial and residential consumers is too small, at only 20% cheaper for the industry, while in the US and the UK it is around 40% cheaper. According to the industry federation of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil has the sixth largest electricity costs in the world.

Motor vehicles

The number of motor vehicles on the roads in Brazil has risen eleven times more than Brazil's population in the past decade, according to a study by the national institute of science and technology (INCP), to over 50.2m vehicles in 2012, up from 24.5m in 2001. The number of motorbikes rose to 19.9m from 4.5m over the same period. No wonder the Friday before Carnival weekend is nicknamed "national gridlock day".

Aratirí

FA Senator Ernesto Agazzi said that “Those at Aratirí are not friends of the government. Who is coercing the government? All companies defend their interests. Are transnational companies good or bad? No. They are about making money. The problem is what the rules of the game are. The government is firm.”

CHILE | Interest rate held. Chile’s central bank agreed on 12 February to keep the benchmark interest rate at 3%. The central bank justified its decision on the grounds that “January’s inflation was unexpectedly high, primarily the core measure.”

Consumer prices gained just 0.1% in January, but this was above the anticipated decline of 0.3%. Annual inflation remained unchanged at 4.5%, above the bank’s 2%-4% target range.

The economy grew by 0.8% in the third quarter of 2014 compared with the same period a year earlier. Fourth-quarter growth will be announced on 18 March.

URUGUAY | Aratirí mine deal. The Indian multinational Zamin Ferrous has presented the government of President José Mujica with a proposal significantly reducing in scale the Aratirí open-pit iron ore mine.

Zamin initially proposed a record investment in Uruguay of US\$3bn back in 2011, promising annual extraction of 18m tonnes (t) of iron ore from Aratirí, a 6,210-hectare plot of land criss-crossing the borders of Durazno, Florida and Treinta y Tres departments in the centre of the country. It would also require a 212km-mining duct and a new Atlantic port.

The less ambitious proposal Zamin has now tabled would result in the extraction of around 1.5m to 2m t of iron ore a year, which could be processed by the port of Montevideo.

This proposal has its advantages for the government. The open-pit mine has been a major cause of controversy with Uruguay’s powerful agriculture and livestock sector, with the agricultural lobby insisting that the scale of the project was far too big for a country of Uruguay’s size and would seriously alter the environmental balance of the area. Zamin’s much more modest proposal would undercut their protests to some extent.

The government is also keen to provide more business for the port of Montevideo which it fears is being strangled by Argentina as a result of recent cargo transshipment restrictions imposed by Buenos Aires; this has resulted in a big fall in maritime cargo traffic passing through the port of Montevideo. In addition, for all Mujica’s confidence throughout his expiring mandate that Uruguay will eventually get a deep-water Atlantic port, it has begun to seem more like a pipedream than a practical proposal.

Zamin’s latest proposal for Aratirí came the day before the senate narrowly voted in favour of extending by one year the deadline to seal a deal with the company to excavate the mine. The right-wing opposition Partido Colorado (PC) and the centre-right Partido Nacional (PN; Blancos) accused the government of “weakness”, caving in to a company which has done nothing but drag its feet and clearly seeking to buy more time in order to sell the project on to another company and get out of Uruguay.

PN Senator Luis Alberto Heber accused the left-wing Frente Amplio (FA) administration of pushing through a “shameful law”. He alluded to a comment by Mujica during an interview on a local radio station that Uruguay could potentially face an international lawsuit if it threw the company out as Zamin has already invested US\$300m in preliminary investigations in Aratirí. Heber said the government was giving in to “coercion”, before going for the jugular in a series of biting rhetorical questions: “Is Uruguay being pressured? What sovereignty are we talking about? Where are the Tupamaros? Are they not going to take up arms against this? These shameless individuals come along and they give them what they want?”

FA Senator Ernesto Agazzi maintained that Mujica had been misinterpreted and that the point he had been trying to make was that any possible lawsuit would delay everything by another four to five years (*see sidebar*). This explanation, however, failed to cut any ice with the opposition. PC Senator Alfredo Solari launched similarly lacerating criticism, saying that it was like living in “a banana republic” where the government was amending the law for the benefit of companies which were not even bringing in investment.

PC Senator Pedro Bordaberry argued that Zamin had left the government with egg on its face, having pushed through congress legislation regulating large-scale mining operations in the country in September 2013, in response to the fierce opposition of the agricultural lobby, specifically with Aratirí in mind. “Don’t keep insisting that the law was not made for Aratirí because nobody believes that. It’s like saying the three wise men are not Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar,” Bordaberry quipped.

López remains defiant one year on

“The trial has become something of a farce, consistently kicked down the line on spurious official grounds. However López and his supporters, led by his wife Lilian Tintori, have done a very good job of internationalising his case as a political prisoner. Despite calls from the likes of the Vatican on the government to release López as a humanitarian gesture, President Maduro, apparently with some regional support, sees no benefit in moves towards political reconciliation this legislative election year.”

On 18 February the Venezuelan opposition leader, Leopoldo López, marked one year in prison. López again called for President Nicolás Maduro to resign, arguing that the government is in a “terminal phase”. He has proposed a national transition accord for the country. President Maduro berates López as a radical right-winger bent, ultimately, on unconstitutional moves.

López, the leader of Voluntad Popular (VP), is awaiting trial on charges including arson and inciting public violence during last year’s three-month long anti-government protests, in which 43 people died. As the leader of the ‘La Salida’ (‘The Exit’) movement that sought to force President Maduro’s resignation via peaceful street protests, López and his colleagues, including the independent deputy Maria Corina Machado, galvanised protests that began, in January 2014, as student-led demonstrations about the authorities’ response to a campus rape in the western state of Táchira. With López’s encouragement, the protests grew into a broader anti government movement and spread to the capital, Caracas. The government accuses López and Machado of plotting to destabilise the country – with the help of the US embassy, a charge that the US has consistently denied.

The trial has become something of a farce, consistently kicked down the line on spurious official grounds. However López and his supporters, led by his wife Lilian Tintori, have done a very good job of internationalising his case as a political prisoner. Despite calls from the likes of the Vatican on the government to release López as a humanitarian gesture, President Maduro, apparently with some regional support, sees no benefit in moves towards political reconciliation this legislative election year.

For one, as long as López is in jail, the splintered opposition is uncertain how to approach the elections and looks weak, demotivated and somewhat rudderless. If he were released, López’s capacity to mobilize supporters might galvanise the opposition into delivering a massive punishment vote to the ruling Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV).

The La Salida movement, which some critics says emerged as a knee-jerk response to moves by the moderate wing of the Venezuelan opposition to engage with the Maduro administration after the December 2012 regional elections (won by the PSUV but with a decent opposition performance in populous urban areas), dealt a fatal blow to the main opposition coalition, Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD), exposing sharp divisions from which it has yet to recover. The one notable absence at a rally held in Caracas in support of López was the moderate opposition leader and twice former presidential candidate, Henrique Capriles Radonski, who *tweeted* his support for López but didn’t appear in person. Capriles, who has seen his political capital dwindle, has long argued that opposition protests ultimately play into the government’s hands. Having rejected the La Salida movement last year, earlier this year he sought to rally citizens of all stripes to come out and mark their discontent at the serious economic crisis in the country, saying the time was now ripe for a mass, peaceful protest movement. However, the call fell flat, amidst high levels of public apathy, further denting Capriles’ efforts to recover the initiative.

Response to coup rumours

There was a sceptical reaction to the alleged coup plot. Critics and opposition leaders accused the government of its customary diversionary tactics. Capriles Radonski was entirely dismissive, *tweeting* that “The only coup today was by the government against our Bolívar, the mega devaluation, the biggest in history!” Under the new Sistema Marginal de Divisas (Simadi) the Bolívar has begun trading at around BF170/US\$1, not far off the black market rate of BF190/US\$1.

US efforts

Ahead of the Summit of the Americas in Panama on 10-11 April, Venezuela looks to be replacing Cuba as the main thorn in US relations with Latin America. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (Celac) has rejected the latest US sanctions on Venezuelan government officials, declaring “strong repudiation of the application of unilateral coercive measures that are contrary to international law”.

US Vice-President Joe Biden, who Maduro accuses of trying to foment a coup, met Tintori and two human rights advocates on 11 February. After the meeting, Tintori said that Biden “was very empathetic” about the problems Venezuela is facing and is “really concerned about the situation”. “It was a deep, emotional, sensitive meeting”, Tintori said. Biden *tweeted* that he met “Venezuelans affected by government oppression to underscore our commitment in promoting human rights around the world”.

Elsewhere, the top US diplomat in Caracas, Charge D’affaires Lee McClenny, reportedly told a meeting of US academics in Miami that Maduro is “not prepared” to deal with the crisis, while also noting that US relations with Cuba, even prior to the December 2014 agreement to restore full diplomatic ties, have long been “more productive” than with Venezuela.

Tintori also met the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza. According to an OAS press release, “during the meeting, Tintori, who was accompanied by relatives of other detained people, delivered details of several open processes against opposition leaders and elaborated, specifically, on the details of the process faced by her husband, which in her judgment suffers from flaws that do not meet the standards of due process”.

In a recent interview Insulza again stressed the importance of internal dialogue to resolve what he called a “critical” situation, lamenting however that the government does not want to talk. Venezuela’s ambassador to the OAS, Roy Chaderton, dismissed Insulza as a “pawn of the extreme Right”. Insulza, who leaves office in March, admitted to a “complex relationship” with Venezuela in his two terms as secretary general.

Coup rumours dismissed

According to President Maduro, the government recently foiled a US-backed coup plot, dubbed ‘Operation Jericho’, whereby rogue air force members planned to bomb the presidential palace, among other targets, using a Tucano fighter jet.

Maduro on 12 February said that seven air force officials had been detained. The national assembly president, Diosado Cabello, later named four military officials he said had been detained, as well as 12 other members of the military wanted for questioning. Cabello identified the four detainees as: Henry Salazar Moncada, Carlos Esquera, Jesús Salazar Moncada and Ricardo José Antich, whom Cabello said was dealing with the US embassy to sort out asylum for the plotters.

On his TV show, *Con el Mazo Dado*, Cabello also showed footage of computers, mobile phones and an array of weaponry that he said had been seized in various raids. ‘Operation Jericho’, Cabello claimed, was also to involve an attempt on the life of the jailed López, orchestrated by rival opposition members Julio Borges and Antonio Ledezma, the mayor of metropolitan Caracas. The plan was to create chaos and instability, Cabello intimated, thereby allowing the conspirators to justify the coup to the international community. Also implicated, according to Cabello (citing alleged testimony from the detainees) was Juan José Rendón, the well-known conservative publicist and political strategist, and Patricia Poleo, a journalist. He also named a local businessman, José Gustavo Arocha Pérez, also reportedly detained.

Energy integration

On 12 February the Colombian government led by President Juan Manuel Santos announced the inauguration of an electricity interconnection project between Puerto Ospina (Colombia) and Puerto El Carmen (Ecuador), on opposite sides of the Putumayo River. Part of the Plan de Fronteras para la Prosperidad (PFP) bilateral border development programme, the new facility will provide the 1,250 residents of Puerto Ospina with access to electricity 24 hours a day. For the past 30 years, Puerto Ospina has been supplied with electricity by petrol-powered generators that only provided power for five hours a day. According to an official statement, there are now plans to construct an aqueduct and sewerage system starting in April 2015.

COLOMBIA | **Feeling the effects of lower oil prices.** According to a report released on 11 February by Colombia's mining & energy ministry, domestic oil production was up 2.7% month-on-month in January 2015 to 1.02m barrels per day (bpd) -surpassing the government's production target of a million barrels a day for the fourth month in a row. While the increase in production also extended to state-owned oil firm, Ecopetrol, the main player in Colombia's oil sector, the firm's total earnings for 2014 are expected to come in at between Col\$9.4trn and Col\$9.6trn (US\$3.93bn and US\$4bn), a 29.8% decline on that registered in 2013. This stems in part from the recent devaluation of the Colombian peso against the US dollar but is mainly due to lower international oil prices. This is a concern for the government led by President Juan Manuel Santos because it could not only impact on its finances but also slow domestic economic growth.

In November 2014 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released a study forecasting that if oil prices averaged around US\$60 per barrel (/b) in 2015, this could have a significant impact on Colombia's unemployment rate (with unemployment even returning to double digits in 2016), due to less activity in the oil sector.

The new lower oil price scenario has already caused Ecopetrol to adjust its plans. On 13 February the company announced that it had secured a syndicated loan from eight international banks for US\$1.92bn. According to local energy sector analysts, the loan will be used to reinforce Ecopetrol's financial position in the face of the current adverse oil sector scenario. But this has done little to allay concerns about Ecopetrol's financial future. On the back of the oil boom of the last few years, Ecopetrol has paid out dividends roughly equal to 70% of its profits, a level that may now be too high and should be revised down. Yet given the ambitious investment plans pursued by the Santos government, which include a new metro line for Bogotá, lower dividend payments may not be readily accepted by the government, Ecopetrol's main stakeholder. César Cuervo, an analyst from Credicorp Capital, has noted, "in the context of the government's fiscal necessities it is difficult to conceive of Ecopetrol paying less [dividends]". This has led Cuervo and other analysts to warn about the risk that Ecopetrol may end up with less resources to invest or even in debt as it struggles to meet its obligations to its shareholders. There are signs that such concerns are already being factored in by the market. Over the last 12 months, the value of Ecopetrol's shares have fallen by 35.1% as international oil prices crashed and the firm announced that it would have to readjust its plans. Meanwhile the possible impact of lower activity in the oil sector on unemployment levels has led Labour Minister Luis Eduardo Garzón to remark: "Let us do everything possible for this not to affect the world of the workers, there are 110m workers in the oil industry [who must] be most protected".

PERU | **Lower growth.** Peru's economy grew by 2.35% in 2014, the lowest rate since 2009, according to the latest figures from Peru's national statistics institute (Inei). While in early 2014 Peru's central bank (BCRP) predicted 5.5% growth for 2014, by the end of the year it had revised its forecast down to around 2.4%. But Inei's figures show that last year's growth was even lower than expected. According to an Inei report, GDP fell due to lower activity in various sectors. Activity in the fishing sector fell by 27.94%; manufacturing was down by 3.29%; and mining by 0.78%. It was not all bad news, however. The financial & insurance sector grew by 12.6%; services, by 6.6%, and telecommunications, by 6.5%. The government predicts that growth for 2015 will come in at 4.8%, while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts slower growth of just 4%. A recent study published by the IMF forecasts that 2015 will be a mediocre year for the Peruvian economy due to weakening international commodity prices (e.g. oil and minerals).

Enforced disappearances come under international scrutiny

For the second time in a month, Mexico's response to last September's mass abduction and alleged massacre of 43 students in Iguala, Guerrero, is coming up for international scrutiny. The first occasion was the early February hearings by the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), the second is the impending arrival of a group of international experts set up by agreement between the government led by President Enrique Peña Nieto and the relatives of the missing students.

On 1 March the 'interdisciplinary group of independent experts' will visit Mexico for the first time to begin its assessment of the investigations into the fate of the 43 students abducted in Iguala on 26-27 September 2014. The group was set up in mid-January as the result of an agreement between the Mexican government and representatives of the abducted students.

Its members are Claudia Paz y Paz from Guatemala (a former attorney general and expert in penal law, who will chair the team), Francisco Cox from Chile (expert in constitutional law), Ángela Buitrago from Colombia (expert criminologist), Alejandro Valencia Villa, also from Colombia (expert in promotion and defence of human rights), and the Spanish doctor Carlos Beristain (expert in health education).

Its stated mission is to formulate plans for the search 'in life' of the disappeared students, the technical analysis of the investigation with a view to determine penal responsibilities, and the technical analysis of the government's plan of assistance to the victims. In other words, it will test the accuracy of the claim made by federal procurator-general Jesús Murillo Karam that it had been 'scientifically proven' that the students were killed by members of the Guerreros Unidos gang and that their bodies were incinerated in a rubbish tip and dumped into the San Juan river — a version of events which is challenged by the missing students' relatives.

The work of the commission will be entirely funded by the Mexican government; it has been given an initial six-month mandate (which may be extended if necessary), and is expected to produce a preliminary report by end-May or early June.

The CED hearings

The Iguala episode was not the specific focus of the CED hearings held in Geneva on 2-3 February. Though it was cited as an example, the main ostensible concern was Mexico's fulfilment of its commitments as a party to the United Nations (UN) Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (a status which it ratified in 2008).

The two CED rapporteurs, Luciano Hazan and Rainer Huhle, repeatedly asked the Mexican delegates about the existing records on enforced disappearances, and what was known about how many were Mexicans, migrants, women or children. The head of the Mexican delegation, Juan Manuel Gómez Robledo (under-secretary for multilateral affairs and human rights at the foreign relations ministry), acknowledged that "in the present state of our records we cannot say that there is an exclusive record of enforced disappearances [because the existing records] mix missing persons and eventually those

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“One morsel of new information was provided by Eliana García Laguna (deputy federal prosecutor for human rights) who said that at present the authorities are trying to determine the fate of 11,309 persons recorded missing between 31 December 2012 [when President Peña Nieto took office] and 31 October 2014. Previously, she said, 18,000 persons reported missing had been located.”

forcibly disappeared.” This, as has been reported by our sister publication *Latin American Security & Strategic Review*, was hardly news [see SSR-14-08; -11].

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Gómez Robledo wrapped up the hearings noting that on 2 February the congress had begun its sessions on the draft ‘general law on enforced disappearances’. The first step, he said, was to amend the constitution so as to allow for a single law for the entire federation (each individual state has its own legislation on the subject). The next step will be the law itself, which should be concluded “before the end of the current legislature, in June”.

When rapporteur Huhle presented the CED’s conclusions on 13 February, he said, “We don’t know how many enforced disappearances there are because the state has not provided the figure, but we do know that there are many, too many [...] In more than half of the country’s states there have been cases of this heinous crime [...] We are talking about thousands of cases of enforced disappearances and only six people have been convicted.”

In its findings the CED says, “The information received illustrates a context of generalised disappearances across a great part of Mexico’s territory, many of which could be classified as enforced disappearances.” The CED “observes with concern” the following:

- That the different jurisdictions present uneven levels of fulfilment of the obligations established by the Convention.
- The lack of precise statistical information about the number of persons subjected to enforced disappearance.
- The information that there have been numerous cases of disappearance of migrants, including children, among which there may be cases of enforced disappearance.

The CED makes a set of recommendations, among which those seen as urgent are:

- To establish a single national register of enforced disappearances.
- To increase efforts to prevent and investigate the disappearances of undocumented persons.
- To create scientific and forensic units to find the disappeared and identify remains.

It also recommends the amendment of legislation so as to provide for the penal responsibility of hierarchical superiors, and formal acknowledgment of the CED’s competence to receive and examine complaints filed by individuals.

The Mexican interior and foreign relations ministries immediately rejected the CED’s findings and recommendations on the grounds that the former “do not adequately reflect the information provided by Mexico” while the latter do not “provide additional elements that might reinforce the actions and commitments being carried out to address the challenges mentioned.” On the other hand the foreign relations ministry said it hoped the group of experts would “help generate a juridically robust result.”

Lawsuit halts Obama's immigration plan

The governments of 26 states, led by Texas, have managed to halt President Barack Obama's executive decision to defer the deportation of illegal immigrants brought to the US as children or have a child who is either a US citizen or a legal permanent resident. A federal judge ordered a temporary stay only two days before implementation was due to begin.

In January US district judge Andrew Hanen heard the arguments of the 26 states (basically, that Obama was not legally empowered to issue the executive order). On 16 February he ordered the plan to be put on hold while the substance of the suit was decided. Had he not done so, two days later the Department of Homeland Security would have started to receive applications from those potentially eligible for the plan.

The political component of the lawsuit is clear. "It's worth noting," says the Pew Research Centre (PRC), "[that] all but two [of the suing] states have Republican governors and all but four had Republican state attorneys-general when their cases were filed." To this must be added that the potential impact of the Obama plan is hardly equal in the cohort of 26 states.

The PRC has estimated the number of the plan's potential beneficiaries at about five million. It has calculated that only 2.3m (46%) of these live in the 26 states that have filed the suit. And in these the numbers are highly concentrated. Two states account for almost half: Texas with 825,000 and Florida with 300,000. Four more states — Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and North Carolina — account jointly for 17%.

The PRC notes that the overall number of potential beneficiaries account for about 1.6% of the total US population and 1.5% of the combined population in the 26 states that jointly filed suits. Among these, the proportion of the potentially eligible in the population is higher than 2% in only three: Nevada (3.7%), Texas (3.2%) and Arizona (2.4). At the other end of the spectrum, four of the suing states have fewer than 5,000 potential beneficiaries.

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Potential beneficiaries in challenging states			
<i>% share of population</i>			
State	%	State	%
Nevada	3.7	Tennessee	0.8
Texas	3.2	Wisconsin	0.7
Arizona	2.4	Alabama	0.6
Utah	1.8	Indiana	0.6
Idaho	1.8	Michigan	0.5
Georgia	1.8	Louisiana	0.4
North Carolina	1.6	Mississippi	0.4
Florida	1.6	Ohio	0.3
Nebraska	1.5	Montana*	0.1
Kansas	1.3	North Dakota*	0.1
Oklahoma	1.3	Maine*	0.1
Arkansas	1.1	West Virginia*	0.1
South Carolina	0.8	South Dakota*	0
*Fewer than 5,000 potential beneficiaries			
Source: Pew Research Center.			

Strengthening ties with Moscow**Russia-Nicaragua military cooperation**

President Daniel Ortega said that as a result of bilateral military cooperation accords, at least 100 Nicaraguan military officials had studied or were studying in military academies in Russia. Other signs of this cooperation include the government's announcement in 2013 of plans to construct a new Russian-funded training centre in Nicaragua for anti-drugs officials and joint anti-drugs operations.

Last week Russia's defence minister, General Sergei Shoigu, became the latest high-level government official from Moscow to visit Nicaragua to reaffirm bilateral relations with the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) government led by President Daniel Ortega. While the visit was just the latest sign of the growing bilateral ties, a process which has gathered pace since the FSLN administration took office for a second term in 2007, the prospect of closer military cooperation is seen with apprehension by some of Nicaragua's neighbours such as Colombia.

During a 12 February meeting attended by top officials including the commander of Nicaragua's army, Julio César Avilés; Nicaragua's First Lady and official government spokesperson, Rosario Murillo; and Russia's ambassador to Managua, Nikolai Vladimir; President Ortega and Shoigu announced plans to boost military cooperation.

The announcement – which failed to provide specifics beyond a reference to “strengthening the joint fight against drug trafficking” – was but the latest example of the closer security cooperation between the two countries (*see sidebar*). But it nonetheless reignited the controversy that emerged last year regarding Russia's potential military involvement in Nicaragua. This after Shoigu said in February 2014 that Russia was planning to expand its permanent military presence outside its borders by placing military bases in a number of foreign countries – including Nicaragua. These remarks were soon contradicted by other Russian officials. The following month ambassador Vladimir said that the discussions between the two governments had centred on a possible agreement whereby Russian military planes and ships would use Nicaraguan facilities for maintenance purposes only. Meanwhile in May 2014, the government-aligned media *eI19digital* cited Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, as saying that the two countries were discussing the establishment of “technical maintenance bases” to assist the Russian navy.

The announcement by President Ortega and Shoigu also came soon after Nicaragua's army inspector, General Adolfo Zepeda, revealed that the FSLN government was planning to purchase new combat aircraft to allow Nicaragua to better enforce its airspace sovereignty over the expanded maritime territory it was awarded in 2012 at Colombia's expense by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Zepeda did not give any further details as to what type of aircraft Nicaragua was interested in purchasing but the local media was quick to speculate that these could be Russian MiG-29 'Fulcrum' fighter jets. Zepeda's announcement, which was made on 10 February, elicited a swift response from Colombia, with Senator Jimmy Chamorro, of the ruling Partido de la U, urging President Juan Manuel Santos that same day to call on the senate's foreign relations committee to analyse whether Nicaragua's intentions to purchase new aircraft represented a threat for Colombia.

Other areas of cooperation

Shoigu's visit came less than a month after a 55-member parliamentary delegation from Russia, led by senate chair, Valentina Matvienko, made a trip to Managua. Following a meeting with President Ortega on 13 January, Matvienko highlighted efforts to boost political, economic and trade ties between the two countries. She cited as examples the fact that last year an inter-governmental committee on scientific-technical and economic-trade

Sica observer

Following the visit to Managua by Russia's defence minister, General Sergei Shoigu, President Daniel Ortega told reporters that Russia was interested in becoming an observer member of the Central American integration system (Sica), whose full members are Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Belize and the Dominican Republic.

cooperation began work, as well as noting that last year Russia sent 25,000 tonnes of wheat, 200 tractors and ten harvesters to Nicaragua.

Matvienko also pointed out that Nicaragua is set to be one of the first of 36 countries to host land installations for GLONASS, the Russian satellite-based global navigation system. In July 2014 Nicaraguan national daily *El Nuevo Diario* cited Ambassador Vladimir as saying that the new system, which performs a localisation service for land- and sea-based targets comparable to the one provided by the US-managed Global Positioning System (GPS), could be functioning within two years.

Matvienko's remarks regarding efforts to boost trade and investment are also borne out in the fact that last year a high-level Nicaraguan delegation paid a visit to Russia to attend the 22-24 May St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (Spief). Headed up by finance and trade ministers, Iván Acosta and Orlando Solorzano Delgadillo respectively, the delegation also included Ortega's son, Laureano Ortega Murillo, an advisor to the State investment promotion agency, ProNicaragua.

Co-operation with Russia has remained strong. According to the most recent report on foreign cooperation (dated October 2014) by Nicaragua's central bank, in the first half of 2014, Russia was Nicaragua's second biggest single overall bilateral donor after Venezuela, stumping up US\$19.2m of a total of US\$291.8m received in foreign aid. Yet at the same time, according to a report by the Nicaragua's export agency (Cetrex), the Central American country's exports to Russia reached just US\$18.71m in 2014, just 0.06% up on the previous year and accounting for just 0.68% of Nicaragua's total exports.

Military concerns back in the spotlight

The renewed focus on military cooperation comes as human rights NGOs like the Centro Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos (Cenidh) and the Comisión Permanente de Derechos Humanos (CPDH), as well as the Catholic Church, are expressing fresh concerns about possible human rights violations by the Nicaraguan military.

This after a bomb left in a rucksack went off in Pantasma municipality, Jinotega department, the previous month, killing three people. The authorities have dismissed the violence as a settling of accounts between rival gangs and on 12 February General Zepeda denied that it had been a military operation. Yet the incident, which took place on 20 January, has reignited concerns about political violence in the north of the country (where the Contras were active during the first FSLN government [1979-1990]). With the Church having raised concerns since 2009 about the presence of armed anti-government groups in the area, on 9 February the Bishop of Jinotega, Carlos Enrique Herrera, said that he was not satisfied with the investigations carried out by the police or the official explanation for the violence.

In its investigation into the incident, Cenidh – which identified the three deceased as Modesto Duarte Altamirano, 'Nacho' and 'Serenio' – drew parallels with attacks which have taken place in the past against armed groups like the Frente Unido Andrés Castro (FUAC), made up of members of the Ejército Popular Sandinista (EPS) disillusioned with the FSLN leadership after the conflict.

It is also worth pointing out that in October 2013, Pantasma was the site of deadly clashes between the military and alleged armed groups during efforts to pursue a former Contra, Gerardo de Jesús 'El Flaco' Gutiérrez, a leader of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Nicaragüense (CGN) group. At the time, the local press circulated a press release by the CGN which stated that since February 2012, it has had an alliance with another armed group, Fuerzas Democráticas Nicaragüenses (FDN 3-80), to fight the "unconstitutional" regime of President Ortega. Concerns about the presence of these armed groups also emerged in November 2013 after a clash between the security forces and unknown armed men left ten dead in the municipality of Bocas de Ayapal, also located in Jinotega. The Ortega government again described the armed individuals as a "gang of delinquents".

Agricultural exports promotion

On 17 February the Dominican Republic's agriculture minister, Ángel Estévez, hosted his Panamanian counterpart, Jorge Arango, in Santo Domingo, where the two discussed plans to pursue an initiative to promote regional agricultural exports to international markets. Both ministers discussed the "need to create a collective export strategy among the countries in the area, which have similar growing patterns and land size". Estévez added that the initiative should "not only strengthen ties between the producers of the respective countries so as to reduce costs and improve productivity, but it has to extend over the whole region, allowing it to act as one single bloc in the big world markets".

CARIBBEAN | Tourism sector sets new record. On 10 February the Barbados-based Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) released its annual sector report which found that a record 26.3m tourists visited the Caribbean sub-region in 2014, up 5.3% on 2013. Last year saw the fifth consecutive rise in the number of visitors to the Caribbean to reach new record levels, underlining the sector's dynamism. In fact, the number of visitors last year surpassed even the CTO's own projections of a 2%-3% increase. The CTO highlighted that the increase in visitors to the Caribbean was higher than the average global increase in tourism in 2014 which, according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), increased by an average of 4.7%. The CTO report also pointed out that the amount of money spent by visitors to the Caribbean last year also reached a new record of US\$29.2bn, up 3.9% on the US\$28bn spent in 2013. Hailing the results, CTO Chairman Richard Sealy, who also doubles as Barbados's tourism minister, said that "there was strong demand throughout 2014 and I am particularly pleased with our performance during the summer period when our growth rate was almost twice that of the summer of 2013". Sealy added that "this is also an indication that leisure travel to the Caribbean is still in demand; and it is a sign that despite moderate [global economic] growth, stability is returning to the markets and consumer confidence is growing".

Meanwhile CTO Secretary General Hugh Riley noted that "there is no doubt that political conditions, increased airline seat capacity, improved airport facilities, increased stock room... and new initiatives in the marketplace all contributed to this success". He also expressed optimism about the future of the Caribbean tourism industry, noting that the CTO is forecasting an increase of 4%-5% in tourist visits in 2015. Riley said that while the state of Caribbean tourism is unquestionably "sound", it is "vital" that the Caribbean tourism industry continues to grow and create new opportunities for socio-economic development. To this end Riley said that the sub-region must continue to pursue a coordinated strategy to promote the Caribbean as a destination and make the necessary infrastructure investment to ensure that travel within the Caribbean is "hassle free". Riley will no doubt have been encouraged by the 17 February announcement by the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism & Aviation that US airline, Silver Airways, will now offer more direct flights from the US to the Bahamas. The CTO's annual report showed that the US remains the sub-region's main source of tourists, with 13m US nationals visiting the Caribbean last year.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC | Social development spending. According to a study by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef), presented on 16 February, government social spending on children in the Dominican Republic (DR) increased by 56% between 2010 and 2013 to RD\$90bn (US\$2bn), or 3.6% of the country's GDP. Unicef's representative in the DR, María Jesús Conde Zabala, who presented the study, said that it was the first to quantify the Dominican State's investment in promoting the rights of children and young people. Praising the DR for its efforts to increase social spending in this area, Conde said that: "the investment in children irrefutably denotes a State commitment to the country's development [... for this] opens the doors to a life with better health, better citizens, better mental and physical performance and better productivity". The study also attributed the rise in social spending on children to a provision in the 2010 constitution that 4% of GDP must be allocated to education spending in the national budget. This provision was not formally met until 2013 under President Danilo Medina. Separately, also on 16 February the DR's foreign minister, Andrés Navarro, hosted his Indian counterpart, Vijay Kumar Singh, who arrived in Santo Domingo for a two-day official visit. According to a statement by Navarro's office, the two men discussed issues related to social and economic development, amongst other things. Meanwhile Singh said that "our presence in this marvellous country answers to the interest of the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi... to strengthen ties with Latin American nations, especially, with the members of the Sistema de Integración Centroamericana (Sica)".

Quotes of the week

“Some are still surprised at how I put up with everything that I have to put up with.”

Argentina’s President Cristina Fernández after finding out that she is to be formally indicted as part of the investigations into the 1994 bombing of the Amia centre

“Ask Uruguayans if they don’t see politics and poop as synonyms.”

Gonzalo Abella, the leader of radical left-wing opposition coalition Unidad Popular which has its first ever deputy in the new congress

“Allende was a real Socialist not like the false ones we now have in Chile.”

Bolivia’s President Evo Morales takes a swipe at the leftist government led by Chile’s President Michelle Bachelet

Uruguay’s Mujica makes way for Vázquez

Uruguay’s President José Mujica will conclude his five-year term in a matter of days. The former Tupamaro guerrilla, who will turn 80 in May, introduced some groundbreaking legislation in the social sphere - legalising abortion and same-sex marriage - and gained worldwide attention for the legalisation of the sale, cultivation and distribution of marijuana. By his own admission he failed to deliver a much-needed shake-up of the education sector or what, upon taking office in 2010, he called the “mother of all reforms” - to the State. He took some unilateral decisions on State policy, however, which infuriated the political opposition, notably accepting six former Guantánamo detainees from the US last December.

Mujica’s successor, former president Tabaré Vázquez (2005-2010), has already made several overtures to the opposition to try and improve the poisonous relations bequeathed by Mujica; in part Vázquez is motivated by concern that the radical Left in the ruling Frente Amplio (FA) seems intent on causing him difficulties. Vázquez met senior politicians from all of the opposition political parties last month, offering to keep them abreast of any of his government’s legislative initiatives through permanent dialogue; and he has offered them a total of 25 positions on the boards of state companies and other entities to fill as they choose. The three main opposition parties accepted his offer. The centre-right Partido Nacional (PN, Blancos) was the last to do so on 11 February.

The opposition clearly hopes relations will improve with Vázquez in power. After Mujica visited five of the six former Guantánamo detainees on 12 February in their house in Montevideo for the first time since their arrival two months earlier, PN Deputy Jaime Trobo took the opportunity to savage him for accepting the men without consulting congress. “You have to be clear, open, transparent and honest over these issues. Uruguay is not a monarchy, it is a Republic,” he said.

Mujica urged the men to take up some of the job offers that have come their way, arguing from his experience as a prisoner held in solitary confinement for 10 years that it was essential for them to begin to rebuild their lives. Each one will shortly receive US\$15,000 a month from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is poised to take over the cost of their upkeep, which so far has been absorbed by the Uruguayan State.



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