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ARGENTINA: Corruption, Immigration, and Economics Vie for President's Attention

Summary: Despite President Mauricio Macri's focus on strict immigration policies, Argentina suffers more from economic and financial crises than from an influx of immigrants. Corruption, agricultural crisis, and financial instability have undermined Argentine citizens' faith in the government. Although many support Macri's strict immigration policy, he almost certainly will need to refocus on the economic crisis to expand his popularity.

Development and Analysis: Since Macri took office in 2015, he has faced an uphill battle gaining support from the Argentine public. Argentina struggles with many issues, including economic recession, a corruption scandal, and rising drug-related crime. Macri faces intense pressure from critics and supporters alike, but his immigration policy remains relatively popular. The country now confronts the deepest recession in its history. Crippling drought is leading to a lack of agricultural production. Most of Argentina's 47 million population works as farmers or in blue-collar jobs, and less than 50% of the population lives in cities. Thus, agricultural products drive the economy. In the past two years, Argentina defaulted on \$141 billion in foreign debt, unemployment rose to 21.5%, and an estimated 55% of the 47 billion population now live in poverty. The average industrial wage fell by 7.9% and, in the past four years, the homeless population doubled.

The government also faces a major public scandal. A driver for one of the top government officials exposed a multi-decade long corruption scandal revealing the official accepted bribes from many businessmen.

Lack of faith in government and the economy is leading to mass emigration out of Argentina. For most of its history, Europeans from Spain, Italy, and other nations immigrated to Argentina. This combined with its abundance of natural resources and highly educated population made Argentina the unofficial "jewel of Latin America". Argentina's record of poor policy and strict taxation is causing many citizens to lose hope of improvement and move elsewhere.

Former President, Juan Peron's policies, were so popular amongst the Argentine population, that they became tradition and an integral part of Argentina's lifestyle. This Argentine tradition of Peronism, which sees the government as having an important role in wealth redistribution, still influences a large part of public opinion 62 years after former populist President, Juan Peron left office. Leading Argentine civilians to emigrate to wealthier countries in search of wealth. In the past two and a half years, 255,000 people left Argentina—roughly six times the total number of emigrants in the previous decade.

Immigration into Argentina, despite Macri's emphasis, remains small, around 4,000 per year. Macri believes the immigration is bringing in crime from poor Latin American countries.

Although Argentina enjoys relatively little crime, drug-related crime has risen, which Macri blames on drug traffickers and illegal immigration from neighboring countries. Drug traffickers are creative and effective at evading authorities, including hiding marijuana in ambulances. Macri's crack down on immigration reflects a combination of genuine fear that these crimes will increase, plus an effort to rally his blue-collar base and thus distract popular attention from deep-rooted economic troubles that he cannot quickly resolve.

Macri has thus flip-flopped his attention between economics and immigration. He believes that the economy will grow eventually but prioritizes the need for an aggressive policy to deter immigration from poor countries. But, according to the citizens, the economy and their earning potential drive their approval or disapproval of the government. Public opinion sees Macri as moving too slow on economic issues while citizens are living in serious poverty and desperate for change. Although Argentina borrowed \$50 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to stimulate the economy, results might be too slow for the citizens who prefer to seek wealth and stable living conditions elsewhere. While previous presidents raised taxes on agricultural profits, which provided Macri the opportunity to win the presidency, he seems to have lost his focus on improving the economy in favor of his stricter immigration policies.

Popular opinion and historic precedent suggest that Macri should concentrate policies on increasing income and lowering poverty rates for the Argentine citizens. This will most likely increase his chances of being reelected in 2019. Macri's stance on immigration resonates with Argentina's citizens, but the current economic and financial crisis matters more to the population than Macri's immigration policies. Focusing on the financial and poverty issues may increase Macri's support among the people.

If Macri focuses on the economic issues and shows progress in building a firm foundation for his citizens' futures and reducing emigration, he will likely win the presidency again in 2019. However, if he continues to put the financial issues his country faces second, he will probably continue to see moderate disapproval and mass emigration from his constituents.

[Lloyd Hewitt]

BRAZIL: Leading Presidential Candidate Favors Military Rule

Summary: The likely election of hardline presidential candidate, Jair Bolsonaro threatens to raise again the prospect of a military dictatorship in Brazil. Already, interim President Michel Temer has turned to the military to help quell violent crime in Rio. Presidential scandals have led to a potential presidential candidacy that could jeopardize certain groups of Brazilian people

Development and Analysis: With presidential elections scheduled for October, hardline candidate Jair Bolsonaro has taken a clear lead in the polls. General Antonio Hamilton Mourao accepted the position as his running mate. Mourao warned last September that the military could seize power if Brazil's courts do not punish corrupt politicians. The Brazilian Army forced

Mourao from his post as the army's finance chief after similar remarks that the military could step in should chaos occur in Brazil. President Temer has already given the military full control of security in Rio. Bolsonaro tried to downplay Mourao's comments by saying "Nobody wants to seize power that way; maybe we could have a military man winning in 2018, but through elections."

Bolsonaro's unexpected emergence as the leading candidate reflects popular demands for change after two years of political turmoil. On 31 August 2016, the Brazilian Congress impeached President Dilma Rousseff for illegally using money from state banks to bankroll public spending. Rousseff caused many popular protests while in office, including demonstrations over poor public services, rising public transport costs and the expense of staging the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics. Temer as Vice President then became the President of Brazil. Political scandals have become almost normal, and the economy is heading towards a downfall. A Nationwide trucking strike over fuel prices in Brazil finally came to an end in early August after ten days of chaos that threatened to suffocate South America's biggest economy. Following the strike, the CEO of the state-controlled oil company was forced to resign.

Former president and one-time leading candidate for October's election, Luiz Silva, was arrested earlier this year for corruption, helping to push Bolsonaro forward as the leading candidate for the next election. Bolsonaro, running as a candidate for the small Social Liberty Party (PSL), has pegged much of his candidacy on controversial remarks, whether defending the past military dictatorship or suggesting acts of violence against homosexuals. Just a few months ago, Bolsonaro came across as unelectable due to his radical positions, but now he leads in the polls despite serving as an apologist for military dictatorship and torture, his offensive comments about Afro-Brazilians, gay people, and other minorities, and his lack of major party affiliation. Bolsonaro apparently calculates that recent political instability has made many Brazilians nostalgic for stability under military rule. He has repeatedly called for a return to the kind of military rule Brazil endured from 1964 to 1985 by saying "I am in favor of a dictatorship." While political opponents faced torture and even murder during the previous dictatorship, Bolsonaro seemingly supports another by believing dictatorships lead to better education and people having more freedom and security.

Many Brazilians want a military takeover. A secret government poll at the height of the strike found that one third of Brazilians wanted a military takeover. The truckers brought the country to its knees while calling for "military intervention" – a euphemism for a military coup. This spooked all of Brazil. Brazilians cannot even agree on what dictatorship means. Many "interventionists" mistakenly believe no corruption exists under the military. With the government and economy falling apart, Brazil may need some help putting everything back in order in the future. The crime rates in Brazil are sky rocketing, and with all the political scandals, Brazilians are searching for a change and are looking for it in Jair Bolsonaro.

Brazilians view Bolsonaro as someone who will take tough stands. Bolsonaro has support due to his radical ways and Brazil's problems with high unemployment levels, increasing poverty, and a

growing murder rate – some of the population thinks that the government needs a complete turnaround to improve its current issues.

Some of interim President Temer's actions may have unwittingly fed into Bolsonaro's support. In particular, Temer approved a military takeover of security services in Rio as a strong signal of concern for rising drug-related crime there. This action, however, does not address the underlying causes of the violence and may create new challenges as drug gangs are buying off the police and military.

Bolsonaro has pledged to try to develop a better relationship with US President Trump. The US and Brazil have been working towards deepening people-to-people ties through energy, agriculture, innovation, science and technology and through exchange of education for a long time.

[Hannah Grayson]

Chile: Center-Right President Promotes Economic and Political Growth

Summary: President Sebastian Pinera plans to promote private investments that will stimulate economic growth. With a strong economic platform Pinera can fund social programs at home and grow Chilean influence internationally through the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Development and Analysis: On 11 March, Pinera took office for his second, nonconsecutive term; Chile does not allow consecutive terms. Chile has 32 political parties that have formed three coalitions: the Left, the Center-Left, and the Center-Right. Pinera belongs to the National Renewal Party, part of the Center-Right. Unlike previous presidents, Pinera is a prominent businessman, having introduced credit cards to Chile in the 1980's. Additionally, he holds shares and helped found the Chilean National Airline (LAN).

Pinera has a clear plan to increase growth by promoting private investments and increased Chilean trade. During his previous presidency, Pinera promoted private investment and grew the Chilean economy by 5.3%. His economic policies this term will likely follow a similar pattern, but some experts believe that he will take a less aggressive approach.

Pinera's plan for Chile revolves around "the five national agreements." Meaning policies to support children, citizen security, timely and quality health for all, peace in La Araucania, development and poverty elimination.

His policies relating to the children involve education reforms and social programs to reduce poverty. Previous president Michelle Bachelet faced student protests due to her education reforms. She attempted to provide free higher education, but Pinera sees this plan as unsustainable as providing free higher education would take an estimated 3% of the GDP. Pinera will likely make slight changes to Bachelet's education reforms and remove free higher education for all but allow it for some.

Citizen security centers on countering gangs and crime. Modernizing the police force would allow Chile to more effectively protect its citizens. Pinera has also voiced interest in updating Chile's intelligence system. As Chile increases its importance in trade, having an improved intelligence service will allow it to maintain control and monitor situations.

Pinera wishes to streamline Chile's healthcare system by increasing hospital efficiency, reducing the price of medicines, and improving the quality of health benefits. Furthermore, with Chile's aging population the pension system established by dictator Augusto Pinochet appears unlikely to provide complete support for the population and thus needs reform. Pinera has also ruled out raising the retirement age.

La Araucania is Chile's poorest region and home to the largest concentration of indigenous peoples. The native Mapuche people successfully resisted Spanish colonization until the 1800's. Protests have occurred in the region as the Mapuche vie for better representation. Pinera likely sees promoting development and defeating poverty as his most important policy. Growing the economy would allow him to better address the other four issues. For his first international trip of this term, Pinera visited Brazil and Argentina. In his delegation he included 14 businessmen from the Society of Industrial Development and seemed to encourage investments between the three countries. Pinera also sees promoting Chile's digital economy as key for future development. He recently met with tech giants, Apple, Amazon, Facebook, and Google. The goal is to "analyze strategic alliances that allow the country to advance in terms of innovation and technology." Pinera hopes that by promoting investments and cutting the corporate income tax (currently 27%) he can establish a 3.5-4% economic growth rate. Pinera must also decide how to handle the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Since the US left the TPP, Chile has stepped up and filled the leadership role required to keep the trade deal functional. The TPP has also rebranded itself as the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and eliminated 20 provisions that mostly dealt with intellectual property. The 11 members of the TPP voted on 8 March for the new CPTPP, but only four out of 11 have ratified it. Pinera helped establish the original TPP and will likely continue to support the CPTPP while pushing for the needed ratification. It is probable that without Chile's intervention, the TPP probably would have lost effectiveness and eventually deteriorated. Under Chilean leadership, China has shown moderate interest in the CPTPP and Brazil has voiced interest in potentially merging it with the Brazil led South American Common Market (MERCOSUR). However, Brazil is probably making a power-play to gain control of a successful trade network led by Chile. Cooperation between the CPTPP and MERCOSUR could still occur short of a merger. Since the success of Chilean leadership with the CPTPP, states looking for trade in Latin America and Asia will likely turn to Chile.

[Zac Bray]

COLOMBIA: New President and a Changing Tide

Summary: Newly elected President Ivan Duque faces challenges implementing a peace deal with the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), reducing cocaine production and trafficking, stimulating the economy, and dealing with a major influx of refugees from Venezuela. He will likely prove the most pro-US Latin American leader in years because of his strong ties to the US and almost certainly calculates that he needs Washington as a key ally to advance his ambitious agenda.

Development and Analysis: On 7 August, Duque took office. A young, charismatic, US-educated attorney, Duque earned economic and law degrees from American University and Georgetown. He served a single term as senator and worked for the Inter-American Development Bank. During the campaign, his opposition portrayed him as a “puppet” of his mentor and chief supporter for Duque’s bid for the presidency, former president Alvaro Uribe Velez. Both attacked the FARC peace deal as a “joke” and an assault on the people affected by the fighting over the last 52 years.

Throughout the election cycle, the FARC peace deal dominated the debates, and it likely will dominate Duque’s agenda. Although Colombians do not agree with all the aspects of the deal, they largely want an end to the fighting. In its most controversial clause, the peace deal allowed the FARC to create a political party and gave it ten congressional seats that the organization could fill based on an internal vote. While admitted FARC members face an 8-year maximum prison term for their involvement in illegal activities, including drug trafficking and possible crimes against humanity, the newly sworn-in FARC members of congress do not have to account for their crimes prior to service in government. Despite initial public rejection of the deal in a referendum, the congress later voted it into law and into Colombia’s constitution. Post-election, Duque’s opposition transitioned from wanting to throw the deal out, to somehow “perfecting” the deal. Duque also faces the question of whether to restart peace talks with the National Liberation Army (ELN) that former President Santos suspended before leaving office.

Part of “perfecting” the FARC deal will be addressing the FARC members who have not turned in their arms and the criminal gangs seeking to take over the vacated FARC controlled coca lands of the south. The gangs have weapons and a source of income that will help them arm and grow. The gangs are comprised of FARC dissidents, former ELN members, and thugs. The absence of leadership within these gangs leaves them vulnerable and disorganized. If Duque prioritizes coca eradication and the demobilization of these groups, Colombians will likely perceive him as a more successful leader.

Duque will likely reinvigorate drug eradication and law enforcement efforts, possibly including methods that have worried some human rights groups and international backers of Colombia’s peace agreement. Regarding combating drugs, his stances have appeared closer to Uribe’s, including support for aerial spraying of coca crops. The Santos government banned spraying over health concerns about the chemical used. Duque opposes the legalization of some drugs, a growing trend among Latin American countries.

Duque may also opt to strengthen a program to replace coca with legal crops by increasing subsidies, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and investing in new irrigation or roads. Land reform, including the distribution of 3 million hectares to people from whom it was illegally seized, has not come to fruition because capable farmers already hold one-third of the former coca seized land, but lack capital to farm it. The farmers are resorting to planting more coca and pulling it out themselves for the government subsidies in the hope of using it for legitimate farming. Duque will likely calculate that the coca trade and eradication will provide an opportunity to strengthen relations with Washington. A partnership with US drug agencies could lead to a decisive blow to a weakened drug enterprise and push negotiations towards a greater peace between the Colombian government and emerging guerilla groups.

Duque's more pressing priority will likely be the influx of refugees from Venezuela. The recent attempt on the President Maduro's life just one day before his inauguration, and the collapse of Venezuela's economy has caused refugees to flood the border town of Cucuta for supplies, food, shelter, and the possibilities of a better life. Some 30,000 refugees per day are entering Colombia and crime in Cucuta has increased exponentially. This two-front problem may lead to human rights issues. For his part, Maduro has accused former Colombian President Santos of the attempt on his life, suggesting that traditionally difficult bilateral relations between the two countries may get worse.

Duque has come into office with radical ideas for rejuvenating a stalled economy. He favors tax cuts for businesses, plans to expand the major cities into rural Colombia, and wants to expand on cultural markets through music and movies. He wants to keep "homegrown" talent in Colombia, while producing and exporting Colombian entertainment. He hopes to promote Colombia for Latin American movie production. Duque has not released any intentions to increase or decrease production of major trade entities or engage in new trade negotiations. Colombian oil and cut flowers are the two biggest exports to the US, and it ranks as the 22nd largest exporter to the US.

Duque has several obstacles to overcome before he can make good on campaign promises to perfect the peace deal and clean up the issues of corruption that have plagued Colombia's government for decades. Provided he can gain control of the borders, he can then shift his attention to the expanding coca production and gang issues associated with it. Negotiations with the ELN could spark talks with the factions taking over the vacated FARC controlled areas and lead to a lasting peace.

[Joshua Abbott]

CUBA: Lawmakers Update Soviet-era Constitution

Summary: With Raul Castro relinquishing his presidential power, the new President Miguel Diaz-Canel could play a prominent role in shaping the future direction of the country through the gradual and orderly transfer of power to the new generation. Castro probably intends the new constitution to make Cuban socialism more sustainable and to reaffirm the importance of central planning and state-owned enterprises to the economy.

Development and Analysis: On 22 July, the Cuban National Assembly of Popular Power (ANPP) approved a draft new constitution. The current constitution, written in 1976 during the middle of the Cold War, vested all formal legislative power in the ANPP, including to approve the budget and national economic plan, elect the members of the Supreme Court, and oversee the rule-making activities and electoral processes of the provincial and municipal assemblies. The constitution reinforces the one-party system with the Communist Party as the guiding force in society. Since 1965, the Communist Party has governed a highly centralized system. The only legal political party rules as the highest leading force of society and the State, monopolizing all government positions, including judicial offices. All high-level official positions and opportunities for professional advancement depend on party membership, and the Party vets any candidates that run for public office. Only one party-backed candidate runs for each National Assembly seat. The ANPP meets two times a year to rubber stamp decisions and policies introduced by former members of the council.

The new constitution would limit presidential powers a bit by instituting term and age limits and creating a position of prime minister. Introducing a prime minister as well as governors to the constitution, helps Cuba's case in advancing a new socialist identity. The prime minister role would lead the Council of Ministers in day to day running of the country. Governors would rule Cuba's 15 provinces instead of the provincial assembly. This creates somewhat of a hierarchy within the state of Cuba and also paves the way for a gradual transition away from governance by the generation of Revolutionary heroes who have run Cuba since 1956.

The new constitution also appears intended to help Cuba's socialist system to survive and prosper and to convince foreign leaders of Cuba's desire to modernize its state. Indeed, in a revision that has attracted widespread attention, the new constitution refers to promoting "Socialism" versus a "Communist Society." The constitution would legalize the purchase of private property for the first time since Fidel Castro took power in 1959. The number of self-employed business people in Cuba, known as *cuentapropistas*, has already soared into the hundreds of thousands as Cubans open bed and breakfast restaurants and taxi services. Recognizing private property will potentially mean more protections under law for private entrepreneurs and foreign investors. Cuban leadership insists that the proposed changes do not represent a move toward the adoption of a capitalist system. Cuba is moving slowly in the economic reform process, but it will not be rapid or dramatically quick. This models the way Vietnam advanced its society to become a more stable state.

The constitution redefines the institution of marriage as being between "two persons" rather than a "man and woman," opening up the way for legalizing same-sex marriages. This step has come a long way since 1959 when the communist authorities persecuted homosexuals as scum and sent them to work in camps, isolated from the rest of the population.

The government wants to maintain control and conduct changes gradually. Castro has long advocated an injection of the free market in Cuba's economy. Miguel Diaz-Canel stated, "Imperialism and oligarchy are on the offensive against leftist government in Latin America." Cuba wants unity from the people to confront imperialist and reactionary threats.

[Kolby Mays]

MEXICO: President-elect Plans to Attack Corruption within Politics and Society

Summary: As the inauguration of President-Elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) on 1 December nears, he has put forth initial plans to fight corruption. Relying upon his coalition, AMLO hopes to overcome the obstacles established by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). AMLO will likely use pragmatic means to keep campaign promises and implement

programs aimed at addressing important concerns, particularly cartel violence and corruption, likely seeking Washington's help.

Development and Analysis: On 1 July, an overwhelming number of Mexican citizens came out to vote for their new president, and over half voted for AMLO. Record numbers of eligible citizens cast their votes not only for the leader of The National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) party, but also to elect those within AMLO's party coalition in all but one state. Essentially purging the state assemblies and Federal Chamber of Deputies of virtually all PRI representation, AMLO hopes to draw political support from prominent members within the coalition. Details continue to surface about some of the many policy priorities AMLO's administration plans to tackle as a part of the "National Project," which will span the entirety of his six-year presidential term. Identifying corruption as the main cause of inequality and violence, AMLO will focus on reforms guided at dismantling criminality in government and in society more generally.

The composition of AMLO's coalition signifies willingness to reach agreements. A short four years after its official founding, MORENA joined forces with the leftist Labor Party (PT) and the conservative Social Encounter Party (PES), while dissatisfied members from the center-right National Action Party (PAN) as well as members of the PRI controversially moved into the party. In a recent meeting with the former rival and PRI presidential candidate, José Antonio Meade, the two identified the strategic importance of "bringing all Mexicans together" by "working together for the good of the country." AMLO has the opportunity to utilize the breadth of support among the parties as he transitions into power.

The coalition ran on promising to address the issues most important to the constituencies: crime, corrupt political leadership, and drug-cartel-related violence, issues identified by public opinion polls conducted by the Pew Research Center. Up about 12 points from similar polling in 2015, AMLO proved his suitability as the candidate who citizens could back with relative confidence in hopes of making impactful changes to the current condition.

AMLO proposes to fight corruption primarily by addressing the issue of cartel crime and violence through a bottom-up approach. The early stages of his multifaceted plan centers around the idea of "transitional justice," which involves reform to the current system, including leniency in terms of a sentence prior to conviction, amnesty or reduced jail time in some cases. Countries such as Columbia, during its attempt at the peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) had put into effect some of the same provisions and had successful results. AMLO understands the urgency of a solution, as the murder of some 200,000 people since the start of the modern counter-drug effort through the use of the military has failed to yield any positive results. AMLO has made an effort to reexamine the root causes of the strength of the cartels, citing their ability to recruit due to internal conditions as a main factor, and suggests that increasing opportunities for young men could lead to a change in the established norm in some areas. The actions of the upcoming administration will likely elicit the help of Washington as AMLO targets the arms trade, a crucial first step in this bottom-up approach. Any coordination with the US must consider the potential for international alliances between Mexican cartels and

trafficking groups in South America, specifically those with ties to the FARC or the National Liberation Army (ELN).

Another key aspect of AMLO's National Project includes international assistance, particularly to use the anti-corruption mechanisms of the UN and its experience backing commissions that fight crime and political misconduct. Such cooperation would target specific corruption, such as fraud, bribery, or administrative abuse of public contracts. An improvement in multilateral relations could broaden Mexico's options by allowing for countries beyond the US to assist in human rights issues and on the corruption front.

Given his background as Mayor of Mexico City, AMLO will likely approach these issues in many of the same ways as he did before. In the framework of pragmatic approaches, he traditionally advocates for sustained efforts paired with specific actions to work toward a particular end result. Any comprehensive proposals will have to allow for adaptation in the face of unforeseen roadblocks, such as the possibility of not reaching North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) consensus in the near future. AMLO plans to approach all efforts to curb corruption in the framework of decentralization and has little choice but to consult Washington. The outgoing president, Enrique Peña Nieto, has indicated compliance with pursuing a "common front as a nation" in terms of NAFTA, as discussion will gear more towards issues surrounding labor rights and energy issues. To the benefit of both sides, preliminary negotiations relay a certainty of compromise, and the agreed upon sunset clause will force continued discussion about which parts benefit both countries and which do not.

The policy priorities of the upcoming administration could mean drastic change for both Mexican society and politics and also that discussions with Washington about the border crisis may likely play a key role in the NAFTA negotiations. AMLO has already proposed that 25% of funds of a joint project with the US would go towards border security efforts. Similar thinking to the bottom-up approach, the strengthening of the Mexican condition over time could possibly result in diminishing the need or desire for citizens to migrate to the US. In the broader picture, the policy priorities of AMLO's upcoming administration have indicated a shift toward solidarity by planning their focus inward by attempting to fix previous and ongoing corruption. In terms of business and trade, a more stable Mexico would mean more transparency and a potential increase for business opportunities for US-based companies.

[Bryce Leech]

VENEZUELA: Drone Assassination Attempt on President

Summary: Economic unrest has President Nicolás Maduro looking for a way to control the nation, and the failed assassination attempt could offer an excuse to crack down on political opposition. Police have arrested seven in connection with the attack while Maduro has accused several more, including leaders in Colombia and some Venezuelan exiles living in Florida. Maduro plans to continue to repress the opposition parties, which could result in more unrest and possibly more attempts on Maduro's life.

Development and Analysis: On 4 August, Maduro was addressing military members for the 81st Anniversary of the Bolivarian National Guard when an assassination attempt using two drones carrying explosives took place. The first drone exploded in midair followed by a second drone which flew into the wall of an apartment building nearby. Videos of the incident show Maduro looking to the sky as the first drone exploded and then quickly being surrounded by security personnel with shields. Shrapnel and falling debris injured several soldiers.

Following the attack, Maduro quickly blamed Venezuela's "far right" movement, the US Administration, and ex-President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos. Later, Maduro appeared on television addressing the country and openly blamed Colombia for training, funding, and harboring these so-called terrorists. On 5 August, Maduro singled out Julio Borges, a Venezuelan opposition leader living in exile in Colombia. Maduro stated that Borges' co-conspirator is Juan Requesen, a Venezuelan opposition lawmaker who is in state custody. Venezuelan law grants lawmakers, like Requesen, immunity from prosecution while in office, however, the head of the constitutional assembly wants to strip such protections from lawmakers accused of this crime.

In addition to Colombia, Maduro recently claimed his investigation found evidence that a terrorist cell in Miami, Florida participated in the attack. On 11 August, Maduro released a statement blaming Colombia and Juan Manuel Santos, working through Venezuelan politicians, for ordering the assassination attempt, while expressing willingness to work with the US should the FBI provide assistance.

Venezuela's downward economic spiral probably helped motivate the assassination attempt. Venezuela has the largest physical deposits of oil in the world, but the oil found in Venezuela has high sulfur content and viscosity making it harder to refine. Despite the difficulties, however, Venezuela should be a wealthy country considering its natural resources. Due to government mismanagement and decreased oil prices, Venezuelans continue to suffer economic crises including from an inflation rate projected to reach one million percent by the end of 2018. This has led to large unrest in the nation with opposition parties gaining momentum every day. While many opposition leaders live in exile, Maduro has done his best to either arrest or kill his opposition, as seen in the death of Óscar Pérez. Over 2.3 million Venezuelan citizens have fled the country, primarily fleeing to neighboring countries like Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru. This mass emigration has caused a severe strain on the economy and public backlash.

Several opponents of Maduro, including Julio Borges, have questioned the legitimacy of the attack and claimed that Maduro planned it in order to crack down on the opposition. Whether the attack was staged, Maduro will likely use it to warrant repression of the opposition and to rally his ruling elite.

[Elizabeth Poffenberger]

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