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# Issue 473

## Of Eagle Eye Intelligence

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## COLOMBIA: Government Corruption Likely an Effort to Maintain Control

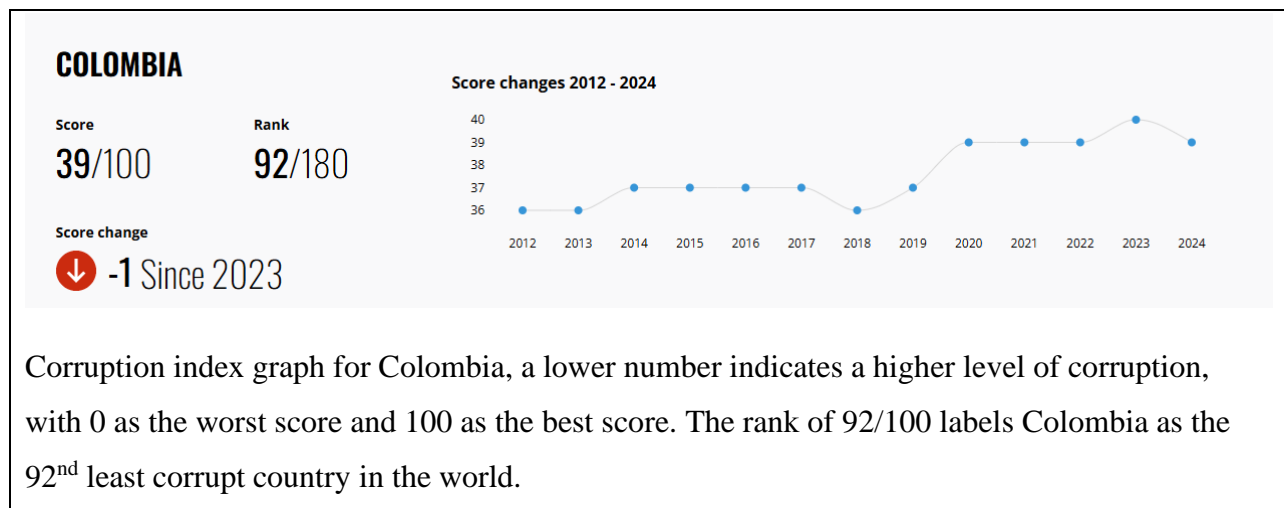
**Summary:** Corruption runs rampant in Bogota, with high-ranking government officials likely attempting to gain political influence and remain in control. Systemic corruption and “Cartels of the Robe” attempt to exert power and control over politics. They accomplish this by using their positions and funds gained through illegal means to endorse a candidate or fund projects. These scandals often occur close to election years, suggesting an attempt to gain control, but could potentially lead to the opposite effect.

**Background:** In 2023, tape recordings within Bogota uncovered unfavorable means of gaining funds for President Gustavo Petro’s campaign, according to *Latin Times*. The recordings suggested Petro gained financial aid from drug trafficking guerillas, according to *Latin Times*. Judges accept bribes in exchange for minimal sentencing or preferential treatment, according to Insight Crime. Bogota officials also have accepted bribes from cartels and other citizens in an attempt to influence the law in their favor, according to The Borgen Project. Corruption disproportionately impacts those of lower socioeconomic status who can’t afford the bribes, according to the Borgen Project. Around 88% of citizens consider Congress corrupt, 70% view all officials as corrupt, while believing that prosecution only has a 36% effectiveness rate, according to the Borgen Project.

**Cartels of Judges likely attempt to gain political influence:** These cartels likely try to gain influence by expressing favoritism in their professions toward powerful figures. This corruption likely stems from not only corruption, but also political or social influence. For example, if the judges don’t indict or reduce the sentences of important political figures, those figures almost certainly become indebted to them. As a result, the judges likely now have more political influence in the government. Judges charge defendants money to give them preferential outcomes on their sentences; this kind of corruption and sentence reduction directly prey on the impoverished and those who cannot afford to get a reduced sentence, according to Insight Crime. Often, this type of corruption favors politicians and executive officials within the government, according to Insight Crime. In a larger scandal in 2013, officials caught 11 judges who favored offenders who paid them, often \$1000 or more over a one-year period, according to *Insight Crime*. In 2021, former Chief of Justice Francisco Ricaurte accepted bribes, namely from officials

and politicians, and implicated five other judges in his scheme of corruption, according to Insight Crime.

**Potential Political Motives Behind Systemic Corruption in Bogota:** Officials in Bogota contribute to recent scandals, likely to exert power over the other party to boost public opinion. Since Petro cannot run again in the 2026 election, this could likely mean that the administration wants support for their projects so that they can continue past the administration's time. The push for political support likely aims to help the party continue to remain in power, because Petro ran the first leftist government. On 4 April, Colombia One wrote about the most recent corruption scandal in the government, implicating at least three officials under Petro's administration, according to Colombia One. Former Deputy Director of Colombia's National Disaster Risk Management Unit, Sneyder Pinilla, embezzled millions of dollars under the pretense of water tankers for a drought ridden area, according to Colombia One. With the help of the former director of the unit, Olemdo Lopez, the men aimed to divert public funds with the goal of gaining political support for Petro administration projects, according to Colombia One.



**2026 Campaigns Will Likely Continue to Shift Toward Right-Wing Leadership:** As an outcome of the 2026 elections, the left party in Bogota will unlikely remain in power. The first leftist government, which Petro runs, remains highly unpopular, according to *The Manilla Standard*. Currently, right-wing candidate Vicky Davilla leads the polls, which centrist Sergio Fajardo follows, and lastly, Petro endorsed left-wing Gustavo Bolivar, according to Colombia One. Currently, the left-wing trails behind in the opinion polls; the most recent corruption scandal likely has served as an effort to regain party control. On the contrary, further negative

opinions about the party may arise because officials diverted the funds away from vulnerable communities in Colombia. Pinilla also implicated other high-ranking officials within Petro's administration, which likely contributed to a further negative view of the party. Although corruption started long before the leftist government, the scandals almost certainly suggest an effort to fund government projects that will boost public opinion so the left party can remain in control.

**Outlook and Implications:** The scandals of 2013, 2021, and 2024 preceded election years, which may likely suggest an ulterior motive to fund government projects or to gain political influence, so that their party and candidates remain in power. In the 2013 and 2021 scandals, the officials likely attempted to influence the political landscape and gain influence valuable to their personal agendas. By organizing groups that essentially operated as organized crime networks, the leaders likely gained the support of officials with similar viewpoints who would support the agenda. The most recent scandal involved only people within the left government suggesting the party likely attempted to remain in control of Bogota. These kinds of scandals will most likely continue as efforts to gain influence in the political world. In addition to having political influences, the monetary component influences the success of projects, which likely explains why most of the scandals involved money, because it likely ensured they got what they want.

[Sophia Thompson]

## **PANAMA: Crackdown on Sanctioned Vessels Will Likely Boost Global Reputation**

**Summary:** Panama City’s near-certain removal of 128 registered ships likely reflects a continuing trend of tightened maritime restrictions. The country’s updated legal framework, which allows the swift removal of flagged vessels under international scrutiny, will likely come up again in the future. The current removal almost certainly signals Panama City’s increasingly favorable alignment with Western regulatory norms. This policy shift will likely harm short-term registry revenue but will probably encourage the registration of higher-quality shipping clients.

**Background:** Panama holds a uniquely influential position in the global maritime sector, largely due to its control of the world’s largest open ship registry. The Panama Maritime Authority (PMA) accounts for roughly 14.55% of global maritime trade tonnage, a statistic that highlights Panama City’s importance as a global hub for commercial shipping. For decades, however, this registry has also functioned under the criticism of being a “flag of convenience”—a system that allowed ship owners to register vessels under Panama City’s flag while operating outside of Panama City’s jurisdiction and sometimes international law, according to Marine Insight.

This practice, though economically beneficial in the short term, made Panama City vulnerable to reputational risks. Shipowners that use flags of convenience violate sanctions, evade taxes, and carry out environmentally damaging operations. In response to mounting international pressure, particularly from Western institutions focused on trade compliance and sanctions enforcement, Panama City’s government issued Executive Decree No. 512 in October 2024. This decree gives the government authority to revoke a vessel’s registration if they find it on major international sanctions lists or suspected of engaging in illicit activity, according to WorldECR.

This legal development marked a turning point in the country’s maritime governance, effectively signaling a departure from permissive registration policies and the beginning of a more rules-based, compliance-focused maritime strategy.

### **Panama Will Likely Leverage Vessel Deregistration to Strengthen Global Reputation:**

Panama City’s decision to deregister sanctioned vessels almost certainly reflects a deliberate shift toward alignment with international regulatory norms, particularly those of Western powers. This move likely enhances Panama City’s credibility as a maritime authority by

signaling a proactive effort to combat illicit shipping practices. Although the number of affected vessels is relatively small, the symbolic impact is significant and probably marks a long-term pivot from permissive registration policies to a more principled, compliance-driven approach. Panama City's Maritime Authority officially canceled the registration of 107 vessels, with an additional 18 vessels pending deregistration, according to Reuters. Most of these ships appeared on international sanctions lists that agencies such as the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), the European Union (EU), and the United Kingdom (UK) maintain. Legal framework established under Executive Decree No. 512 enables these actions, which they published in the Panama Official Gazette in October 2024.

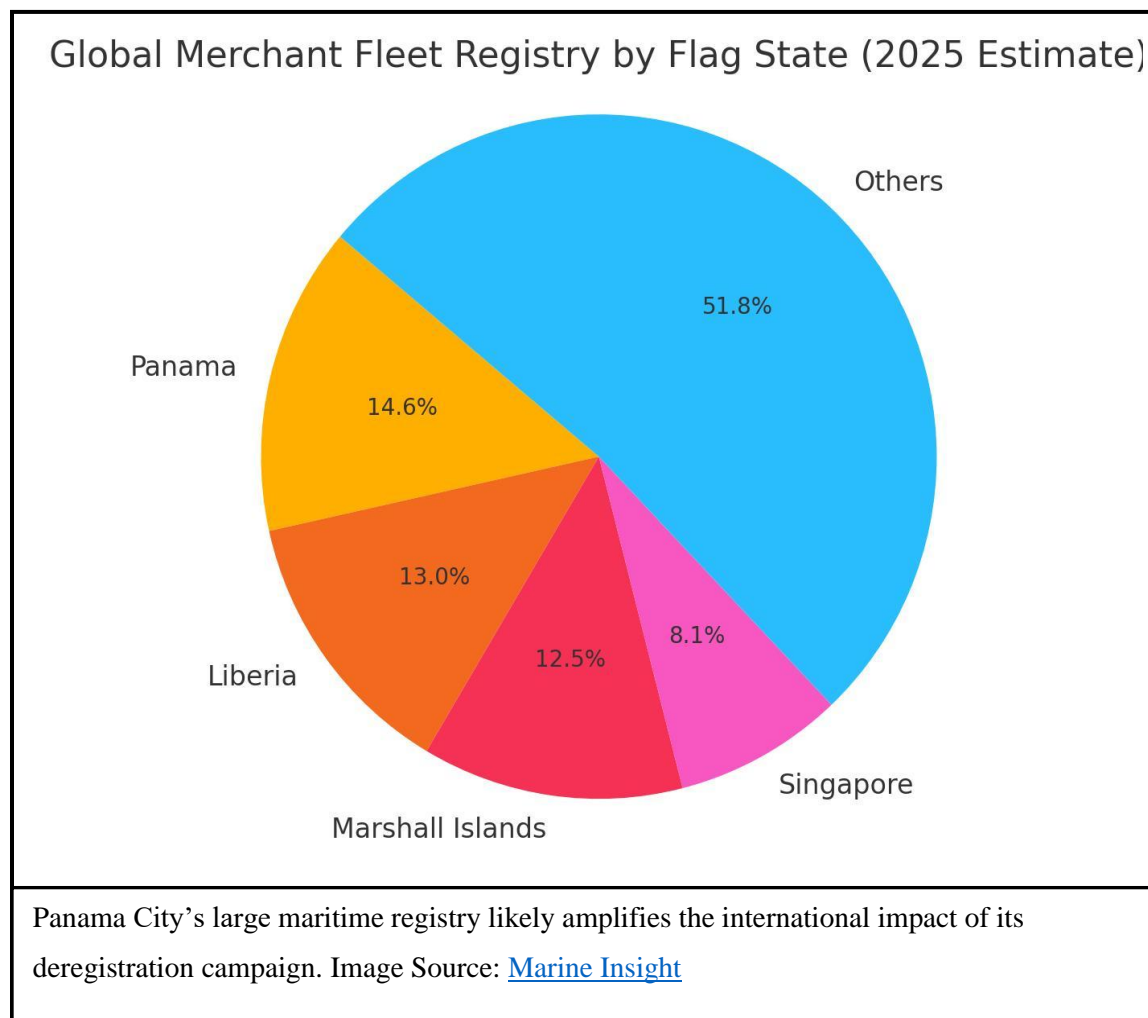
In public statements, Panama City's authorities emphasized that the nation would take a zero-tolerance stance on vessels associated with illicit trade, sanctions evasion, or unauthorized flag-switching. This approach almost certainly represents a clear commitment to restoring integrity to Panama City's flag and ensuring that it only allows law-abiding, compliant vessels within its registry. Although deregistration affects only a small fraction of Panama City's registry, the symbolic value is significant. By making public, rules-based decisions that prioritize transparency, Panama City is likely reshaping its global image and differentiating itself from other open registries that continue to prioritize volume over compliance.

### **Disruption from Canceled Registrations Will Almost Certainly Strain Maritime Revenue**

Panama City's deregistration campaign will almost certainly impose short-term economic costs, particularly in the form of lost registry revenue and trade disruptions. These immediate setbacks will likely challenge the government's ability to balance regulatory reform with fiscal stability. Nonetheless, Panama City's leadership appears willing to absorb these losses in pursuit of long-term reputational gains and strategic alignment with global compliance standards. The deregistration of 128 vessels could reduce Panama City's registry revenue by several million dollars annually, according to AInvest. Removing just 70 of these vessels could result in an annual revenue loss of around \$2 million. For a country whose economy depends heavily on the shipping sector, such financial trade-offs are significant, according to The Maritime Executive.

Moreover, deregistering vessels tied to sanctioned entities will likely cause temporary disruptions in the supply chains that depend on these ships. This may force shipping companies to seek alternative flags or restructure logistical operations, leading to increased costs and

operational delays. These disruptions could affect international trade routes reliant on the consistency of Panama City’s merchant fleet, which represents approximately 15% of global shipping tonnage.



### **Tougher Oversight Will Probably Help Attract High-Quality Fleet Registrations:**

Panama City’s deregistration initiative is not merely a reactive policy, but part of a longer-term strategy to modernize and legitimize its ship registry. Panama City’s registry has achieved a compliance rate of 96.5%—a figure that reflects substantial improvement over previous years. Ramón Franco, the Director General of the Merchant Marine, has publicly reaffirmed Panama City’s zero-tolerance policy toward misuse of its registry, underscoring a national commitment to better governance and adherence to international maritime standards, according to gCaptain.



Panama City registered 358 newly built vessels in 2024—a record high that points to increasing confidence from reputable shipping companies, according to Hellenic Shipping News.

**Outlook and Implications:** Panama City's recent decisions suggest a firm and likely irreversible trend toward improved maritime governance. The removal of vessels tied to sanctioned or illicit activities is only the first step in a broader reform effort aimed at boosting compliance, increasing transparency, and realigning Panama City's registry with international best practices. These changes, while economically costly in the near term, are likely to produce significant long-term benefits. From a strategic perspective, Panama City is positioning itself as a "clean registry" that appeals to high-quality clients and global regulators alike. The effort may serve as a model for other maritime nations seeking to balance economic viability with international legitimacy. Additionally, Panama City's realignment with Western regulatory standards may deepen its diplomatic and trade relationships with major economies, while deterring criminal enterprises from exploiting its shipping infrastructure. Panama City's vessel deregistration campaign highly likely represents more than a bureaucratic change—a strong pivot in the country's maritime identity. By choosing to prioritize quality over quantity and transparency over tolerance, Panama is likely to emerge as a global leader in ethical shipping practices, setting a new standard for international maritime governance.

[Gavin Packard]

## **SYRIA: Pressure on Captagon Market May Increase Regional Counternarcotics Efforts**

**Summary:** The Captagon industry lost access to state support due to the fall of the Assad regime in Syria. The production industry will likely seek new markets in the region to keep up with the demand for Captagon, and in turn increase counternarcotic efforts.

**Development:** On 12 April, Syrian forces seized roughly four million Captagon pills on its western coast. Since the fall of the Assad regime in Syria, the Captagon industry lost its state support and infrastructure. The new government in Damascus pledged to dismantle the Captagon trade in Syria and assist surrounding countries, such as Jordan, in spreading the regional market. The Lebanese government in January elected a president, a position that was vacant for the last two years, and the new government in Beirut is guaranteeing the sovereignty of Lebanon from non-state actors. The Captagon industry previously established influence and infrastructure in Lebanon with the help of Hezbollah. Jordan borders southern Syria, a significant hub for Captagon production in Syria. Armed militant groups and the Syrian military have been conflicting on the border since Damascus increased operations to secure its border with Lebanon.

**Analysis:** The expansion of Captagon will likely lead to increased counternarcotics operations aimed at countering it to help maintain and increase regional stability. The Captagon production industry will likely increase market efforts in Lebanon and Jordan to meet the demand from the void of state-actor support from the Assad regime. The loss of state support in Syria will likely lead the Captagon industry to increase its operations in Lebanon's already-existing infrastructure. The new government in Beirut is attempting to govern the entirety of Lebanon, which will likely lead to increased counternarcotics efforts against its Captagon industry as a response to the shifting Captagon industry to Lebanon due to its existing market infrastructure. Lebanon and Jordan already have existing smuggling routes due to their proximity and previously established influence, which will likely be a driving factor in the movement of the Captagon industry.

[Jacob Faciana]

## IRAN: Economic Pressure and Weakened Proxies Likely to Impact Nuclear Deal Decision

**Summary:** Tehran and its regional proxies have lost significant power across the Middle East. Tehran's economy is experiencing high inflation, poverty, and food insecurity. Tehran will likely concede certain aspects of its geopolitical ventures to reach an agreement with the U.S. to lift economic sanctions.

**Development:** On 12 April, Tehran and Washington met in Muscat, Oman, to discuss the outline for a nuclear deal. A nuclear deal for Tehran would lead to the lifting of economic sanctions. Tehran's economy is experiencing 35% inflation and a food scarcity rate of 55%. Iranian media reported that 80% of Iran has fallen below the global poverty level. The Assad regime in Syria fell in December of 2024, which was a major strategic ally of Tehran. Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran's most powerful proxy in the Middle East, is attempting to rebuild after a recent war with Israel, which came to a ceasefire agreement in November 2024. Tehran recently sent long-range missiles to its proxies in Iraq ahead of negotiations. The U.S. has B-2 stealth bombers in Diego Garcia, an island 2,400 miles south of Iran's southern coast.

**Analysis:** Tehran will likely concede to aspects of Washington's nuclear deal to seek relief from economic pressure. If Tehran does not curb the existing economic challenges—high poverty, inflation, and food insecurity—it will likely face civil unrest. As Tehran's proxies continue to weaken, Tehran will most likely continue to lose negotiating power with Washington. There are two likely motivators influencing the long-range missiles sent to Iraqi proxies: to increase negotiation power before the nuclear deal outline or to send arms to its proxies in the region before possibly conceding regional access to proxies from the deal. Tehran's diminishing control over allied forces in the region and the stationing of B-2 stealth bombers in Diego Garcia will likely influence Tehran's decision to concede elements of its support to proxies in the region.

[Jacob Faciana]

## IRAN: European Union Likely to Enact Snapback Sanctions

**Summary:** The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) parties are likely to extend snapback sanctions on Tehran due to its transfer of cruise and ballistic missiles to proxies in Iraq.

**Development:** On 9 April, Tehran transferred cruise and ballistic missiles to its proxies in Iraq for the first time. The transfer comes just three days before the first round of negotiations with the U.S. on a nuclear deal. Under the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2231, Tehran cannot partake in any activity related to delivering ballistic missiles, or it would violate the JCPOA. Shortly before the transfer of missiles to proxies in Iraq, the U.S. stationed at least six B-2 stealth bombers in Diego Garcia, roughly 2,400 miles south of Iran's southern coast. In 2018, the U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA, making any decisions from the U.S. unenforceable. The European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK) decide to extend or enact snapback sanctions on Tehran. Snapback sanctions on Iran will expire in October 2025. The U.S. currently has a 90-day pause on reciprocal tariffs on the EU.

**Analysis:** Tehran's transfer of cruise and ballistic missiles to its proxies in Iraq will likely trigger a response from the EU and UK regarding the sanctions on Iran. The EU will likely attempt to coordinate with the U.S. on any snapback sanctions on Tehran due to the U.S. losing its decision authority in the JCPOA. The EU may feel inclined to extend or enact snapback sanctions on Tehran for the U.S. due to the reciprocal tariffs currently on a 90-day pause. The EU choosing to align itself with the U.S. on firm policy for Iran may alleviate trade policy on the EU that is set to expire in three months. The EU would likely be able to use its pressure with Iranian sanctions as influence in trade policy with the U.S. With Tehran having most of its geopolitical ventures reversed in the last four months and U.S. military pressure in the region, the EU will likely use this moment to keep pressure on Tehran's growing nuclear program to influence trade policy with the U.S. before the reciprocal tariffs resume.

[Tucker Jones]

## About GSIS

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's (ERAU) Bachelor of Science in Global Security & Intelligence Studies (GSIS) degree program at our Prescott Campus blends both academic and professional studies to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become future leaders in intelligence, security, and law enforcement. The program provides students with a sound foundation in the liberal arts, including international relations, foreign languages and cultures, international law, foreign policy, political and military history, and other essential topics.

## About EE

Eagle Eye Intelligence (EE) is an intelligence and research organization led by the students of the GSIS program at ERAU in Prescott, Arizona.

Dr. Philip E. Jones founded EE and Embry-Riddle's GSIS program in 2002, following a career with the Central Intelligence Agency and consulting work in international development and global security. Currently, Professor Dale R. Avery, a former career intelligence analyst, serves as EE's faculty advisor.

EE strives to provide actionable intelligence and analysis to its customers during the academic year. We are driven by a number of goals – continuous development, nonpartisanship, interdisciplinary studies, global awareness, and professionalism.

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Lauren Estrada, a Senior in the GSIS program, currently serves as EE's Editor in Chief. For questions or comments, contact the team at [editorsee@gmail.com](mailto:editorsee@gmail.com) or Professor Avery at 928.777.4708. If you use material from this publication, you should attribute: Eagle Eye Intelligence Edition 473, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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