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## FEATURED Q&A

# Has Mexico's Security Improved Under Peña Nieto?



Peña Nieto said in his state of the union address that the past year has been a difficult one, referring to the presumed killings of 43 students in Guerrero state and the escape of drug lord Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. // Photo: Mexican Government.

**Q** This month, an independent investigative probe reported that Mexican officials were wrong about the circumstances and motives behind the attack on the 43 university students a year ago in Guerrero state. Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto mentioned the case in his Sept. 2 state of the union address, adding that it has been a "difficult year" for Mexico and for his administration. As Peña Nieto approaches the halfway mark in his presidency, how would you rate his handling of citizen security and rule of law? What should be the first tasks of Renato Sales, whom Peña Nieto named as his national security commissioner amid a cabinet reshuffle on Aug. 27?

**A** Andrés Rozental, member of the Advisor board, president of Rozental & Asociados in Mexico City and senior policy advisor at Chatham House: "It has been a year since the disappearance and apparent murder of 43 student teachers in the town of Ayotzinapa in the State of Guerrero. For President Peña Nieto and his government, the Ayotzinapa case has been a millstone that most recently has returned to the headlines after a special commission of inquiry set up by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Mexican government released a report which concludes that the official version had serious flaws and in some cases simply could not have transpired the way the government said. The main criticism that has been leveled against the president and his team is that the administration initially dismissed the events in Ayotzinapa as one more example of the local violence that affects many of Mexico's southern states and did not give them the importance they merited. A prolonged vacuum of information

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## Powerful Quake Strikes Chile, at Least Eight Dead

The 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck the country's coast at 7:54 p.m. local time. More than one million people were evacuated, and numerous aftershocks continued rattling the country through the night.

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### ECONOMIC

## Brazil Recession May Cost More Than 1 Million Jobs: Federation

Brazil's recession could lead to the loss of as many as 1.6 million jobs, said the Rio de Janeiro State Federation of Industries.

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### POLITICAL

## Maduro Closes Last Bridge Linking Venezuela, Colombia

The closure of the José Antonio Páez bridge was Maduro's most recent move in his crackdown on cross-border smuggling.

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Maduro // File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Powerful Earthquake Strikes Chile, at Least Eight Dead

A powerful 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck Chile's coastline Wednesday night, leaving at least eight people dead and forcing more than one million people to evacuate. The quake hit at 7:54 p.m. local time and was centered 29 miles west of Illapel, at a depth of 15.5 miles, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. The quake was felt as far away as São Paulo,



**Once again we have to confront a tough blow from nature."**

— Michelle Bachelet

more than 2,000 miles away, The New York Times reported. In a televised address after the earthquake, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet said her government was inspecting the damage. "Once again we have to confront a tough blow from nature," said Bachelet, referring to the country's history of earthquakes. Bachelet urged evacuees to remain on higher ground until the damage could be completely evaluated, the Associated Press reported. Most of the country's schools are expected to be closed today. The country's national emergency service ordered residents to evacuate from the coast and also ordered residents to leave their homes on Easter Island as well as the Juan Fernández archipelago, The New York Times reported. In all, more than one million people had been evacuated, and power had been cut to 243,000 homes, according to Mahmud Aleuy, Chile's undersecretary of the interior. The death toll could climb as emergency crews reach the hardest-hit areas, officials said. Of the eight people who were confirmed dead on Thursday night, a 35-year-old woman was killed in Illapel when she was crushed by a falling wall, and a 20-year-old woman was killed after being

struck by rocks, The New York Times reported. Three men—two in Valparaíso and one in Santiago—died after suffering heart attacks. The quake caused large waves, which reached 15 feet, in the port city of Coquimbo, 285 miles north of Santiago. Flooding hit many parts of the town, damaging the port, a fishing wharf and parts of downtown. Extensive flooding also hit the town of Tongoy, destroying a police station, a preschool and parts of a health clinic, authorities said. Tsunami warnings were issued for locations as far away as California and New Zealand. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center issued a tsunami watch for Hawaii but later downgraded it to an advisory, the AP reported. Chilean officials lifted tsunami warnings for the country early Thursday. Although the full impact of the quake was not yet clear early this morning, it appeared that the earthquake was less damaging than an 8.8 magnitude earthquake that struck Chile in 2010, leaving more than 500 people dead and causing billions of dollars in damage. Since then, emergency planning and measures to reduce risk have improved, according to experts. "It is true that preparedness and risk reduction in Chile is ahead of that in much of the world, and that makes a difference," Susan Hough, a geophysicist at the U.S. Geological Survey, told the AP. Late Wednesday and early today there were several aftershocks, including one with a 7.0 magnitude, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

## Maduro Closes Last Bridge Connecting Venezuela, Colombia

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro extended his government's crackdown on smuggling along the country's border with Colombia, resulting in the shutdown of the last open bridge connecting the two countries, the Associated Press reported Wednesday. In an order issued late Tuesday, Maduro extended a state of emergency to 10 additional municipalities on Venezuela's western edge, including some in Apure state, the third state to have the restrictions. Maduro did not specify that he was closing

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Second Victim Identified in Case of 43 Abducted Mexican Students

The remains of a second Mexican student of the 43 students kidnapped last year and now presumed dead were identified by the attorney general's office, BBC News reported Thursday. The remains of the body of Jhosivani Guerrero de la Cruz were found in a garbage dump outside the city of Iguala in the Guerrero state. The remains of the body of Alexander Mora Venancio were identified last December. The fates of the other 41 students remain unknown.

## U.S. Appeals Court Rules in Argentina's Favor in Bond Dispute

In a win for Argentina, a U.S. federal appeals court ruled in the Argentina-U.S. hedge fund managers case that a district judge should not have allowed some bondholders to demand repayment without proving how much they are owed, the Associated Press reported Wednesday. The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that District Judge Thomas P. Griesa had over-simplified the class of bondholders who would be affected by his ruling, making it too easy for bondholders who were not the original purchasers of the bonds from Argentina to demand repayment.

## Glencore in Talks to Sell Portions of Future Mining Production in Chile, Peru

Multinational mining company Glencore is in talks with five companies to sell a portion of its future copper mining production in Chile and Peru, Mining.com reported Wednesday, citing the Global Mining Observer. Franco-Nevada Corp., Silver Wheaton and Royal Gold are among the companies reportedly involved in the discussions. The deals could include the Collahuasi mine in Chile and the Antamina and Antapaccay mines in Peru.

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and the inability of the investigators to come up with reasonable explanations inevitably led to accusations of police and military involvement, theories involving drug trafficking and demands by the student families for an independent investigation. There is one clear and generalized demand by Mexicans of their government: the country has a huge deficit in applying rule of law and in treating all citizens fairly and equally. As Peña Nieto's sexenio passes the halfway mark, the constant calls for reforms of the judicial system, of the police and military and of an end to impunity grow louder and louder. The recent examples of Brazil and Guatemala in the region have further strengthened the popular protests against time-honored ways of covering up misdeeds and conflicts of interest by both government and business. Renato Sales is the third individual to take on the responsibility of national security in the Peña Nieto administration. Hopefully he'll be more successful than his predecessors and will bring a degree of professionalism and efficiency to the job."

**A** **Mary Speck, project director for Mexico and Central America at International Crisis Group:**

"The independent experts found sloppy investigative work, including misplaced or ignored evidence, flawed forensics and failures to explore credible hypotheses. More damningly, they suggest that federal police and the army took no action, despite knowing in real time about violent clashes that left six people dead the night the students went missing. Prosecutors, apparently under political pressure for quick results, resorted to the bad old ways: confessions (possibly coerced) and a rush to arrest lower-level perps, without exploring higher-level culpability, by commission or omission. Even before the experts issued their report, nearly two out of three Mexicans said they did not believe the government's version of the Ayotzinapa case. At his presidency's halfway mark, Peña Nieto faces a crisis of

confidence. To gain the trust of Mexican citizens, the president must prove that inept, corrupt or criminally complicit officials, no matter what their rank, will face credible investigations, and, if found guilty, will be punished. This applies not only to federal

“**At his presidency's halfway mark, Peña Nieto faces a crisis of confidence”**

— Mary Speck

prosecutors responsible for errors and omissions in the Ayotzinapa probe, but also to prison directors who failed to prevent the July escape of Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán and to federal police suspected of using excessive force in a May gun battle that left 42 alleged criminals dead in Tanhuato, Michoacán. Citizen trust is vital to rule of law. Regaining it should be the top priority for Peña Nieto and his cabinet over the next three years."

**A** **Ruben Olmos, managing partner of Global Nexus in Washington:**

"The fact that the Peña Nieto administration accepted the comprehensive report about the disappearance of 43 university students a year ago in Guerrero state released by a group of experts from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is a sign that the president is well aware of the damage that this incident has done to his image and to that of his administration. The reality is that the rule of law and transparency—the lack of which have been some of the government's biggest headaches—cannot be imposed in Mexico overnight. While the incident in Guerrero was a tragedy and an eye opener, this is not the only state where criminals

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any border crossings, but Venezuelan forces had blocked the José Antonio Páez bridge, which crosses the Arauca River. The closure marked the fifth bridge shutdown in recent weeks, though several cross-border trails and other smaller crossings remain open, the AP reported. Maduro began the border crackdown on smuggling last month after three Venezuelan soldiers and a civilian were wounded in an attack in Táchira state. The crackdown also included Venezuela's deportation of some 1,500 Colombians living on its side of the border.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Brazil Job Losses Expected to Top One Million This Year

More than one million workers in Brazil will lose their jobs this year as an effect of the country's recession, the Rio de Janeiro State Federation of Industries said Wednesday, the Associated Press reported. The industry federation said that a recent analysis indicated that between 1.2 million and 1.6 million jobs will be lost this year, making for the largest job losses for the South American nation in the past 17 years. In 1998, 580,000 Brazilians lost their jobs. Government statistics bureau IBGE said in August that Brazil's GDP had contracted for the second quarter in a row, officially marking a recession. The economy shrank 1.9 percent in the second quarter compared to the first quarter; GDP shrank 0.7 percent in the first quarter of 2015 as compared to the last quarter of 2014. This year, Brazil has faced a drop in international commodity prices, sluggish global economic growth, rising inflation and high interest rates. "Given that the economy is not expected to resume growing until 2017, the job market will continue to weaken next year," said economist Gesner Oliveira, president of São Paulo consulting firm GO Associados in an email to the AP. He also said that the construction and manufacturing industries would see the highest job loss rate of all industries in the country.

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have an influence on local authorities, including mayors and police. The new national security commissioner should continue to work with governors to clean up state police forces and local courts. He should work with the new Congress to push secondary laws to make the National Anti-Corruption System a reality and strengthen legislation on human rights and the functionality of all the police forces. In fact, these were key items that the president mentioned in his state of the union address as priorities for his final three years in office. While Mr. Peña Nieto's economic reforms were historic, the country will not see results without an honest judicial system that sanctions corruption at all levels and brings peace to desperate families countrywide. It is yet to be seen if all political parties in Congress will cooperate and work with the administration leading up to what appears to be an early 2018 presidential race to replace Peña Nieto."

**A** **Sylvia Longmire, owner of Longmire Consulting:** "President Enrique Peña Nieto can only do so much with regard to internal national security when most of that is relegated to local forces. Unfortunately, levels of corruption in states and municipalities are often so high that they mitigate any attempts at the executive level to enact meaningful security reforms. Peña Nieto's

main problem is the lack of transparency in dealing with criminal elements, both through law enforcement and in the judiciary. The story about the 43 missing students is still changing even at the one-year mark; but how much control does Peña Nieto really have over the affairs of Guerrero state despite his best intentions, other than sending in military forces? As long as elected officials and police at the state and municipal levels are subject to control and influence by criminal groups—which is the case for the foreseeable future—then the president's security policies can't make much of a dent. Peña Nieto's term mid-point is also capped off by the escape of notorious drug lord Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán, whose capture only 16 months prior was ironically the administration's biggest victory by far. It's plain to most drug war observers that this 'kingpin strategy'—begrudgingly carried on from that of the previous administration—has not reduced violent cartel activities. Renato Sales' priority shouldn't necessarily be capturing drug lords; rather, it should be ensuring transparency of government and justice at all levels whenever possible. Otherwise, the Mexican people will never have faith in their national leadership."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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