



Guards and police inspect a vault that was blown up during an armed robbery of Prosegur, a private security company, 24 April 2017 in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay. The well-planned assault involved more than forty assailants who got away with nearly \$8 million and left one police officer dead. Ciudad del Este, located on the border with Brazil, has long been a hub for organized crime activities. (Photo by Mariana Ladaga/Diario ABC Color/Associated Press)

# The Paraguayan Military and the Struggle against Organized Crime and Insecurity

Dr. R. Evan Ellis

**I**n October 2018, Paraguayan security forces successfully foiled two attempts to free “Marcelo Piloto,” a local leader of the Brazilian criminal gang

*Comando Vermelho* (Red Command, or CV) from the *Agrupación Especializada de Policía Nacional* (Specialized National Police Group), a civil police force in Asuncion,



Brazilian drug trafficker Marcelo Fernando Pinheiro Veiga, known as "Marcelo Piloto," holds a press conference at the Paraguayan Police Special Unit 6 November 2018 in Asunción, Paraguay. Pinheiro was extradited to Brazil later that month to face multiple charges. (Photo by Norberto Duarte, Agence France-Presse)

the capital of Paraguay. The sophistication of the plots, which included a car bomb and assault rifles, illustrates the evolution of the transnational organized crime threat in Paraguay.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the successful resolution of the attempts, including intervention by the Paraguayan police special forces organization *Fuerza de Operaciones Policiales Especiales* (Special Police Operations Force), illustrates some progress by Paraguayan security forces in addressing the organized crime challenge.

On 15 August 2018, Mario Abdo Benitez assumed the presidency of Paraguay, bringing with him a combination of well-known political figures and dynamic new ones whose work has begun to show

results in organizations such as the Paraguayan counter-drug organization *Secretaría Nacional Antidrogas* (National Counterdrug Bureau, or SENAD) and the nation's counter-money laundering organization *Secretaría de Prevención de Lavado de Dinero o Bienes* (Anti-Money Laundering Bureau, or SEPRELAD), led by Maria Gonzalez.<sup>2</sup>

On balance, the Abdo Benitez government inherits both an evolving set of security challenges including a quasi-insurgent group and organized crime, and deeply flawed institutions whose reform will be key to successfully meeting those challenges.<sup>3</sup> This article analyzes the evolving security challenges facing the new Abdo Benitez government, including the threat from the *Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo* (Paraguayan People's Army, or EPP) and expanding challenges from the Brazil-based CV and *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (First Capital Command, or PCC) transnational criminal organizations, and the work of the Abdo Benitez government to adapt and reform the nation's key security institutions to address them.

## Paraguay's Evolving Security Challenges

For most of the previous administration and beyond, the Paraguayan government has focused on the EPP, a group of thirty to fifty members operating in the relatively unpopulated departments of Concepcion and San Pedro, as the nation's principal security threat.<sup>4</sup> The United States, by contrast, has concentrated significant attention on illicit activities in the tri-border region defined by Ciudad del Este, Paraguay; Foz do Iguazu, Brazil; and Iguazu, Argentina (see map on page 3). The U.S. focus in the region is on persons affiliated with the Middle Eastern terrorist organization Hezbollah, and the generation of funds for the organization, and perhaps other terrorist groups.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond its particular challenges, Paraguay's strategic importance derives from its position in the center of the

South American continent—through which flow licit and illicit drugs, money, people, and other goods—and the criminal groups associated with those flows. The April 2017 robbery of the Prosegur security facility in Ciudad del Este by an organized, well-armed force of more than fifty persons affiliated with the PCC, an attempt to build a long tunnel to liberate the more than eighty

PCC members in prison in Pedro Juan Caballero, and the previously noted two attempts in October 2018 to liberate local CV leader Marcelo Piloto all highlight the emergence of transnational organized crime as a significant security challenge in Paraguay.<sup>6</sup>

Linked to these violent groups, marijuana is now produced in virtually all parts of eastern Paraguay bordering the Paraguay and Parana Rivers, and the border with Brazil.<sup>7</sup> Such marijuana, which grows well in Paraguay's rich soil, is believed to supply an estimated 50 percent of all consumption in South America.<sup>8</sup> While most Paraguayan marijuana exported from the country goes to Brazil, a portion also is smuggled down the Paraguay and Parana Rivers to Uruguay and Argentina, or through Bolivia to Chile. In addition, Paraguay is also an important transit country for cocaine and other illicit goods destined for Brazil and other markets.<sup>9</sup>

## Paraguay's Other Suitors

In the context of profound institutional difficulties, terrorism, organized crime, and associated corruption that collectively undermine Paraguay's governance



The tri-border area and key roads leading to it from major cities. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)

and still young democratic culture, the Paraguayan government continues to be courted by extrahemispheric actors such as China, Russia, and Iran, among others, in ways that, while limited, potentially raise concerns in Washington.

While the Abdo Benitez government has reaffirmed its commitment to Taiwan and secured a commitment to double the amount of assistance from that country, China continues to look for opportunities to expand its diplomatic and commercial openings there, pursuing meetings in forums like the United Nations General Assembly in 2018, as well as commercial work such as the presence of China-based agricultural purchaser COFCO, which has operated locally in Paraguay since 2014.<sup>10</sup> China-based companies have also participated in bids for highway and

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electricity generation projects, and have expressed interest in constructing a train line crossing the north of the country.<sup>11</sup>

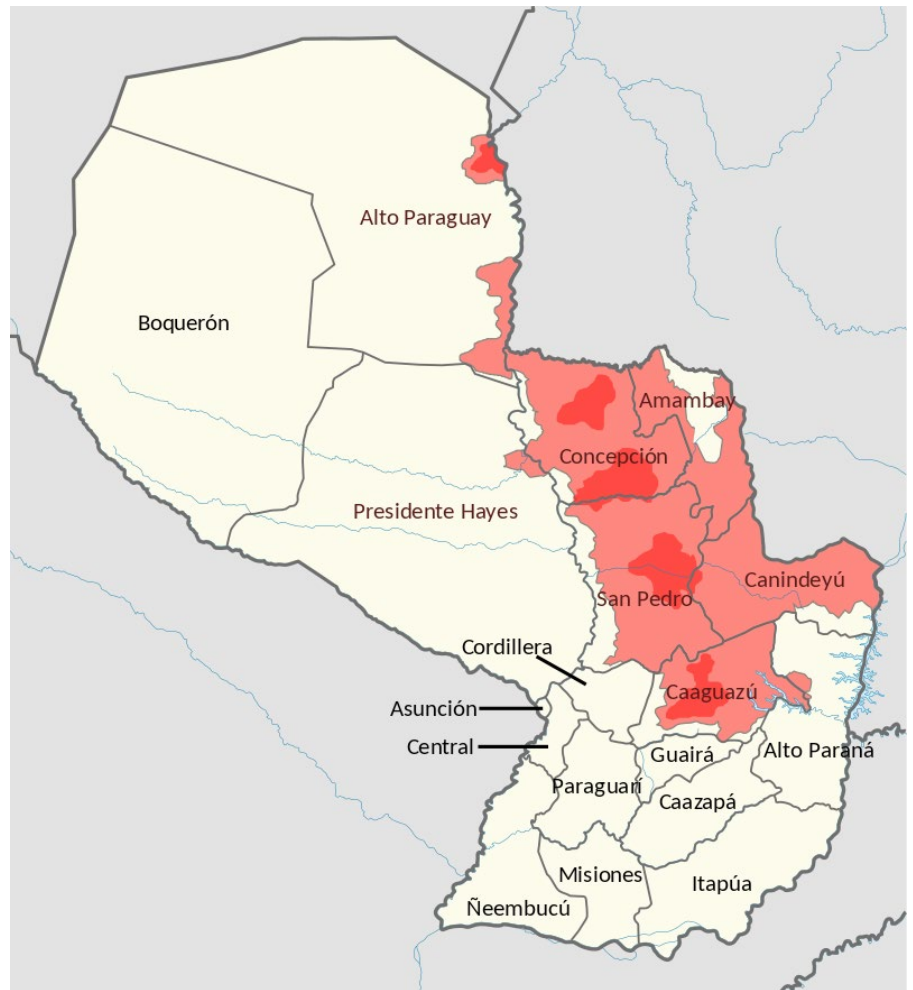
For its part, the Russian Federation has long sought military cooperation with Paraguay, including interest in transforming the Mariscal Estigarribia Airport in the Chaco region into a regional maintenance and repair hub for Russian military aircraft, as well as expressing interest in selling the country transport aircraft and boats, possibly in exchange for agricultural goods.<sup>12</sup> More concretely, it signed a defense cooperation agreement in April 2017, although it has yet to use the agreement to expand the Russia-Paraguay military relationship in significant ways.<sup>13</sup>

While Iran and other Middle Eastern states have been cautious regarding their relations with Paraguay, representatives of the Benitez government did meet with the Iranian and Turkish delegations during the UN General Assembly session in New York in 2018. At the same time, the Benitez administration entering into a spat with the Israeli government over the decision to reverse the decision of his predecessor, Horacio Cartes, to move Paraguay's embassy to Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup>

## Challenges and Adaptation of Paraguayan Government Institutions

The government of Paraguay faces numerous challenges as it transitions to the Benitez administration. These include corruption in many of its institutions, national security demands, and issues with training and equipping its military.

**Nonmilitary institutions.** With respect to the fight against organized crime, the incoming Abdo Benitez government inherits institutions whose effectiveness



The Paraguayan military has been fighting a counterinsurgency against the *Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo* (Paraguayan People's Army, or EPP), mainly in northeastern Paraguay (insurgent activity depicted in red) along its border with Brazil, since 2005. (Courtesy of Mikelgedinto/Wikimedia)

in the past has been severely eroded by corruption and neglect. The grave situation of the Paraguayan police, for example, was highlighted by the November 2018 suspension of the deputy head of the organization, Luis Cantero, under charges of accepting a \$70,000 bribe.<sup>15</sup> Yet, while the incoming administration has indicated its intentions to combat drug traffickers and other criminal organizations, as of November 2018, it had not yet announced any major initiatives to undertake the enormously difficult problem of reforming the police or other parts of the interior ministry.<sup>16</sup>

For its part, the national counterdrug organization, SENAD, under the new leadership of Minister Arnaldo Giuzzio, has achieved impressive early results against drug production and drug flows through the country,



Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benítez visits forward-deployed members of a joint task force organized to fight Paraguayan People's Army (EPP) insurgents 24 December 2018 immediately after an attack of that guerrilla group on the Santa Teresa ranch, located in the department of San Pedro near Asunción, Paraguay. (Photo courtesy of the Office of the President of the Republic of Paraguay)

although it is arguably too soon to be certain whether such results are sustainable.<sup>17</sup> And, Paraguay's independent anti-money laundering organization, SEPRELAD, is another bright spot in the nation's efforts to tackle transnational organized crime. SEPRELAD's new head, Maria Gonzalez, has earned a good reputation as a capable, independent actor, thus far free of serious accusations of corruption, and is working rapidly to reform and prepare her organization for an important upcoming review by an international peer organization, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), in 2019.<sup>18</sup> The task remains a daunting one, however. As of November 2018, Gonzalez estimated that the organization had addressed less than 50 percent of the items previously identified by FATF as deficiencies.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond the police, SENAD, and SEPRELAD, Paraguay has also created a new national-level intelligence agency, the Secretaría Nacional de Inteligencia (National Bureau of Intelligence, or SNI). The SNI was

formally authorized by a law in July 2014 but was officially stood up in 2018. Its first director, Esteban Aquino Bernal, was named by Benitez and began work with the assumption of Benitez as president in August 2018.<sup>20</sup>

The SNI fills a real need in the country for civilian intelligence beyond that provided by the military and police, and it aspires to serve as a centralized repository for data on criminal actors and groups. Nonetheless, the organization is currently limited to having analytical rather than operational capabilities, and it is vulnerable to political concerns that it might be used for political intelligence against opponents of the regime; similar charges have been made against comparable intelligence organizations in Colombia, Peru, and Mexico, among others. The protocols for coordination between the SNI, the military, and police entities (which would provide the SNI information) are also still in the process of being worked out.

**The armed forces, the EPP, and structural challenges.** The incoming Paraguayan government arguably

inherits armed forces that are impaired from addressing the nation's security challenges at all levels by fundamental difficulties with its structure, doctrine, material, and training. The gravity of the situation is exemplified by the inability of Paraguayan security forces to find and eliminate the EPP—a small group operating in a very limited and sparsely populated area in the departments of San Pedro and Concepción—for many years.<sup>21</sup> EPP attacks have taken over sixty lives since the group's emergence in 2008, despite the government having a large dedicated interagency task force operating in the area against the group during the previous administration and a significant expansion of the effort in 2016.<sup>22</sup>

Beyond the unwieldy, geographically oriented organization of the Paraguayan army, the ability of the Paraguayan military to reform itself institutionally, plan, and respond to current challenges is hampered by a series of serious structural issues. To begin, Paraguay's minister of defense is not actually in the chain of command over the armed forces and serves more of an advisory role to the president, limiting his or her ability to affect change. The former minister of defense, Gen. Bernardino Soto Estigarribia, resigned from the post (in which he served during the Cartes administration) in November 2018, reportedly in part over the lack of authority he was afforded in that capacity.<sup>26</sup> A law to put the Ministry of

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Beyond the response to the EPP, the difficulties of the armed forces include the need to acquire or modernize equipment, but the Paraguayan military has little expectation to do so beyond donations that may be received from partner nations. The total Paraguayan defense budget for 2018 is a meager \$280 million, and approximately 80 percent of the defense budget is spent on personnel and retirement costs while approximately half of the procurement budget is spent on nonmilitary items such as office supplies.<sup>23</sup>

In part, the situation reflects the legacy of the privileged position that the Paraguayan armed forces enjoyed during the period of military rule of Gen. Alfredo Stroessner from 1954 to 1989. Within the Paraguayan military, the army is divided into a structure of three “corps” with nine associated divisions, sustaining leadership positions for forty generals, although in reality those corps are smaller than most U.S. infantry battalions.<sup>24</sup>

Officials of the incoming government speak of a plan to restructure the military into a less top-heavy, more operationally oriented force but admit that the task will be extremely difficult politically, since the general officer positions that would have to be eliminated are the desired culmination of the career paths of the Paraguayan officers currently in service.<sup>25</sup>

National Defense in the chain of command has reportedly been discussed but has not yet gone forward.

A second major structural problem for the Paraguayan military is the role of the Consejo de la Defensa Nacional (National Defense Council, or CODENA). The CODENA was established under a 1997 statute as the president's tool for handling national security issues, yet the institution has fallen into disuse—arguably in part because it no longer fully corresponds to the realities of the nation's security challenges or the evolved situation of the military. Although by statute, CODENA is to meet once a month, former President Cartes rarely convoked it, and incoming President Benitez has not yet done so—although he has met individually with its head, Gen. Maximo Diaz Cáceres.<sup>27</sup>

The composition of CODENA, established at a time when the challenges to Paraguay from transnational organized criminal groups such as PCC and CV were less acute, does not include the heads of SENAD or SEPRELAD, nor does it include key justice, economic, and social cabinet ministers, although such figures can be invited to meetings on an ad hoc basis by the president.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, reflecting the era of military dominance in which the law was crafted, the president is expected to travel to the Ministry of National Defense facility to

convoke the council, rather than having his ministers come to him. In practice, the president has created his own informal “security cabinet,” which meets weekly in the president’s office (not the defense ministry). This meeting includes a broader set of ministries, but it does not have the statutory support or supporting bureaucracy that CODENA does.

Specifically regarding the fight against the EPP, the Cartes administration organized a special intra-institutional structure, the Comando de Defensa Interna (Internal Defense Command, or CODI), supported by

organizationally separate and regarded as highly corrupt). Compounding the problem, the JTF’s development of knowledge of the community and terrain is limited by frequent rotations of its members in and out of the area.

Finally, the JTF was created by taking vehicles and other resources from the nation’s other military divisions (including those assigned to operate in the area). It thus has ironically left those locally based forces, which presumably have accumulated the greatest knowledge of the area and its actors, in their barracks without the capabilities and resources to significantly contribute to the fight.

“ The Paraguayan army officially has approximately fourteen thousand persons receiving salaries. . . [the] actual number of serving personnel in the armed forces may be much lower than the official numbers due to a practice in which organizations maintain “ghost persons” on the payroll.

police units, special prosecutors, and a military joint task force (JTF). While the command, in principle, facilitates whole-of-government solutions to the socioeconomic difficulties that contribute to the freedom of action of the EPP in San Pedro and Concepción, in actuality its impact is limited insofar as that the ministries have retained authority over the allocation of resources, undercutting its efficacy as a coordinating entity.

Separate from CODI, an interagency project-facilitating body, the Coordinator for Joint Integrated Action, has been created to identify and facilitate projects that could resolve some of the socioeconomic challenges of the region and thus help the government to strengthen its presence there. Unfortunately, while the organization responds directly to the office of the president, it has no actual units or resources under its control to perform the work. Its head, an otherwise highly capable major general, lacks both statutory authority and cabinet rank to persuade the ministries, who would provide the resources, to follow his recommended prioritization—which most likely differs from the ministries’ own.<sup>29</sup>

Although the military JTF that supports CODI provides security in the area and operates against the EPP is, on paper, a significant force, it is limited by a lack of knowledge of and confidence in its police counterpart in the organization (the CODI police component is

The path that the Benitez administration intends to take to reform the Paraguayan armed forces to more effectively fight the EPP or conduct other missions is not yet clear. The new government has not yet provided the institutional vision that would define such roles and reforms, nor has it proposed specific legal changes that would facilitate such roles.

To help redefine the structure and purpose of the Paraguayan military, in 2012, the Ministry of National Defense laudably published a “white book” outlining the roles and mission of the institution vis-à-vis Paraguayan society and other governmental institutions.<sup>30</sup> While the new government has plans to update the document, Paraguayan defense officials suggest that such changes understandably must wait for the completion of the restructuring, if and when it occurs.<sup>31</sup> In a similar fashion, the ministry has generated a new defense strategy, although it has not yet been approved by the president.<sup>32</sup>

**Materiel and training challenges in Paraguay’s military.** Beyond issues of organization, roles and missions, and authorities, each of Paraguay’s military services face serious materiel and training challenges.

With respect to land forces, the Paraguayan army officially has approximately fourteen thousand persons receiving salaries, although the inflow of conscripts is limited by a high number of legal exemptions, a factor

that the Benitez government has indicated an intention to address.<sup>33</sup> Complicating matters, the actual number of serving personnel in the armed forces may be much lower than the official numbers due to a practice in which organizations maintain “ghost persons” on the payroll who collect salaries but are not actually in the units.

Regarding vehicles and weapon systems, Paraguay has a small number of World War II-era halftracks and M3 and M4 tanks (including fourteen M3s nominally returned to service as a stopgap capability measure). Yet according to experts in Paraguay consulted for this study, very few, if any, of the tanks have functional guns and, for those which do, much of the tank ammunition is of such an age that it is no longer reliable and is potentially dangerous to use.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond tanks and halftracks, Paraguay has a limited number of older Brazilian-made EE-9 Cascavel reconnaissance vehicles and EE-11 Urutu armored personnel carriers. These vehicles were supposed to have been upgraded with help from Brazil in 2009, but the resources were not available on the Paraguayan side and the modernization never occurred.<sup>35</sup> The Paraguayan military has discussed plans to obtain a new class of armored vehicles to replace both its tanks and some of the aging wheeled vehicles. While the acquisition of the Brazilian Guarani armored personnel carrier was cited as the most realistic option by those consulted for this study, the funds are not currently available to take such a procurement forward.<sup>36</sup>

The lack of functional vehicles in the Paraguayan army is arguably compounded by limitations in training both at the unit level and above, with regular combined-arms training almost nonexistent. Paraguayan unit training often concentrates on rudimentary activities such as individual target practice.<sup>37</sup> Much of the Paraguayan army lacks its own doctrine manuals and uses manuals from neighbors such as Brazil.<sup>38</sup>

While the situation of the Paraguayan navy is somewhat better than that of the army, it is challenged to provide a limited presence along the entirety of the nation’s five thousand miles of navigable rivers. Adding to the challenge, the navy is the only governmental body that has law enforcement authority on the water.

The Paraguayan navy has a fleet of approximately 170 small aluminum hull boats to operate on the rivers and a smaller number of larger boats including its flagship, the P-05 *Itaipú* (acquired from Brazil in the

1980s), which is large enough to embark a small helicopter and three relatively fast Croq-15 interceptor watercraft.<sup>39</sup> Still, the Paraguayan navy has little capability to inspect the large quantity of commercial barges that bring goods into and out of the country and, with the exception of the Croq-15s, it has no capability against the fast boats used by more sophisticated criminal organizations operating in the country.

While most of Paraguay’s fleet is in relatively good condition, it is old. One of the boats in the Paraguayan navy that is still in service, the *Capitan Cabral*, was initially built in 1908 (in Holland) as an ocean-going tugboat.<sup>40</sup>

The Paraguayan navy also has a modest aviation capability, including a light Esquilo helicopter, which is used occasionally in operations against smugglers, and six small Cessna fixed-wing aircraft confiscated from drug traffickers.

The Paraguayan navy maintains Cavel, a small boat repair and manufacturing facility; a floating dry dock donated by the United States in the 1980s; a permanent floating dry dock managed by the navy; and a modest shipyard, Arsenal de Marina, which does maintenance on larger craft but has not actually built a ship in some time.<sup>41</sup>

With respect to the air force, Paraguay has two to four aging Tucano interceptors that are still operational and could be used to respond to detected drug trafficking flights. Plans to acquire six additional aircraft, possibly Korean KT-1 fighters, Brazilian Super Tucanos, or U.S. AT-6 Wolverines, have been set aside for lack of resources.<sup>42</sup>

While Paraguay has acquired mobile radars, they are operationally ineffective and are stored in a known public site; so when they are brought out for use, word of their presence is quickly passed to the drug traffickers, who cease their flights before the radars can be effective in detecting and intercepting targets. The Paraguayan civil aviation authority is in the process of building a fixed radar site that could theoretically improve the situational awareness of the air force against drug flights, but the process is going slowly.<sup>43</sup>

## Recommendations

While the Paraguayan government faces significant difficulties in responding to the evolving challenges of EPP terrorism and organized crime, it is important for the United States to continue its constructive engagement with the country and to expand both its level of



attention and engagement with its Paraguayan partners, subject to their continued progress on issues of corruption and commitment to democratic institutions and processes. The current grave situation of many of the nation's security institutions is not necessarily a reflection on the country's new leadership but an indication of how much work remains to be done.

At the geographic center of South America, Paraguay is a nexus for criminal flows of drugs, goods, money, and people, making it strategically important for the hemisphere in controlling those flows and their corresponding consequences. The country must not be allowed to devolve into a more weakly governed space where criminal activities could undermine the security of its neighbors and affect the region's political dynamics. In addition, as noted previously, the attention that China,

government take the difficult steps to help itself, the United States must patiently and skillfully employ a combination of encouragement, materiel and technical support, and incentives. The United States should seriously consider providing more resources for security sector assistance to Paraguay once Paraguayan institutions show the ability to integrate and make effective use of such help. The United States should also consider a broader array of programs administered through the U.S. State Department to strengthen Paraguayan governance and help the country better market and achieve greater value from its agriculture and other industries.

Hand in hand with such assistance, in order to encourage meaningful change, the United States must also respectfully but firmly hold out the possibility of adverse consequences for failing to make a sincere effort

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Russia, and Islamic groups pay to Paraguay is a reminder that if Paraguay's government does not achieve results through working with Western democracies, other actors are all too ready to step in to fill the void.

The United States should continue to work with Paraguay from the top down, beginning with a respectful but serious dialogue with the president, minister of defense, and officials from other government organizations to strongly encourage them to make and persist in politically difficult decisions to achieve meaningful and transformative structural reform. Such work should include, but not be limited to, the critically needed reorganization of the Paraguayan armed forces and the fight against corruption in government institutions.

With respect to the fight against the debilitating effects of corruption in Paraguayan institutions, the United States, working with other interested partners such as those in the European community, should encourage the Paraguayan government to embrace, through its laws and policies, the assistance of external institutions similar to the UN's Commission against Impunity in Guatemala.<sup>44</sup> And in engaging to help the Paraguayan

to attack corruption and reform institutions. Indeed, the United States should maintain the prospect of legal action against individuals found to be corrupt, including the possibility of targeted sanctions against them, if their wealth and influence prevents the Paraguayan judicial system from dealing with them appropriately.

In applying any policy that raises questions regarding Paraguay's ability to police corrupt members within its own bureaucracy and political elite, the United States must understand that the natural tendency of the “bad actors,” as well as some of those protective of the nation's sovereignty, may be to threaten or embrace alternatives such as China and Russia, which are sometimes more disposed to provide assistance without the types of conditions and oversight that threaten the corrupt. The United States must be careful in navigating such delicate political terrain, employ concrete information as its chief instrument of persuasion, and respectfully build consensus among Paraguayan leaders committed to the fight against corruption and extrahemispheric actors, who corrupt leaders use to circumvent accountability and protect themselves. Only in this fashion can the United States

reasonably hope to guide the sovereign Paraguayans to decisions that advance their own institutional health.

Within the domain of working with the Paraguayan government to strengthen its institutions, the United States should give particular attention to and push for police and judicial reform. Such help should begin with assistance in identifying and clearing out corrupt officials at the top level. From there, however, the reforms must continue across the institution and include expanding resources for regular confidence testing of personnel as well as the implementation and maintenance of databases to identify warning signs of corruption within the institution's personnel (e.g., officials whose spending patterns do not correspond to their income). The United States must also help Paraguay identify and expel corrupt

the organization when appropriate. The United States should further employ its leverage with other parts of the government to ensure that SNI is effectively provided necessary intelligence on a timely basis, to include helping with the technical aspects of constructing and maintaining a national database to integrate information from other organizations. The organization should be encouraged to focus on threats beyond the EPP (which was used in 2014 to pass the law enabling the organization).<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, it should also resist the temptation to encourage SNI to focus too heavily on issues prioritized by Washington, such as the presence of Hezbollah in the tri-border region. Perhaps most importantly, the United States must make it clear that all resources and support to SNI could end abruptly if the organization allows itself to be used to gather political intelligence.

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members and help their authorities build databases for rapidly resolving cases and to track those they expel. Doing so will be critical to ensure that the reformed Paraguayan institutions, whether police and judicial organizations or the military, will not simply replace the problem of corrupt personnel with the greater problem of thousands of angry, unemployed corrupt personnel who possess knowledge of the system and motivation to exploit its weaknesses.

Beyond helping Paraguay with such reforms, the United States should also strongly support the courage of competent individual leaders who avoid corruption and take initiative, and provide them with the resources and political cover that they need to succeed. This may include encouragement for positive and courageous actions and initiative by individual Paraguayan leaders and organizations, such as those suggested to date by the new leadership of SENAD and SEPRELAD.

In the same vein, the United States should work closely with and support the fledgling new National Bureau of Intelligence, provide it with training and resources, and share information with vetted parts of

With respect to military reform, the United States should employ its resources and leverage with the Paraguayan government to encourage it to complete its military restructuring, develop an updated defense white book—a national security policy and strategy. Perhaps most importantly, the United States should help the Paraguayan military develop a planning system for applying limited resources in a rational, transparent fashion to meet identified needs as well as to acquire and sustain those resources over time. To this end, U.S. institutions such as the Ministry of Defense Advisors program, the Defense Institution Reform Initiative, and the William J. Perry Center are among the useful tools that the United States has to help on the defense side.<sup>46</sup> U.S.-funded billets for training in institutions such as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation and the U.S. Army War College, if appropriate to Paraguayan needs, may be particularly useful in this regard.

As an incentive for its Paraguayan counterparts to incur the discomfort of departing from their existing way of doing things, the United States should offer them the realistic prospect of expanded and expedited

assistance in developing materiel, technical, and personnel solutions to the problems identified in this article and other similar challenges.

For too long, Paraguay has received little attention in Washington except for the latter's concern with the activities of a small number of criminals and terrorists in the tri-border area. Yet as noted in this article, Paraguay is at the center of the licit and illicit flows that connect the continent. What happens in Paraguay with those criminal groups and flows has the potential to negatively

affect the dynamics and well-being of its neighbors, and ultimately of the United States, which remains connected to the continent by ties of commerce, geography, and family. The United States has everything to gain from helping the country to succeed. ■

*The views expressed in this work are strictly the author's. He would like to thank Cesar da Rosa Lopez and Gabina Gavilan, among others, for their insights contributing to this work.*

## Notes

1. "Así se frustró el segundo intento de liberar a Marcelo Piloto [Thus foiled the second attempt to liberate Marcelo Piloto]," *Ultima Hora* (website), 24 October 2018, accessed 13 December 2018, <https://www.ultimahora.com/asi-se-frustro-el-segundo-intento-liberar-marcelo-piloto-n2775391.html>.
2. "Mario Abdo Benítez jura como nuevo presidente de Paraguay [Mario Abdo Benitez swears in as the new president of Paraguay]," *El Pais* (website), 15 August 2018, accessed 13 December 2018, [https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/08/15/america/1534345907\\_538917.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/08/15/america/1534345907_538917.html); "Jefe narco es detenido tras megaoperativo en Alto Paraná [Drug lord is detained through mega operation in Alto Paraná]," *Ultima Hora* (website), 6 September 2018, accessed 6 December 2018, <https://www.ultimahora.com/jefe-narco-es-detenido-megaoperativo-alto-parana-n2705826.html>.
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