In Depth

Where in the World Is Peña Nieto?

This week, Mexico’s president-elect, Enrique Peña Nieto, is on a six-country Latin American tour that includes Guatemala, Colombia, Chile Argentina, Brazil, and Peru. While not unusual for Latin American leaders to meet counterparts before taking office, this preinaugural whirlwind suggests that Mexico’s new leadership may be looking more to the south as well as the north for support in addressing central concerns—fighting crime, strengthening border security, addressing migration issues, and seeking new investors to boost economic growth. This marks a departure from Mexico’s more insular approach in the region. It underscores a blossoming eagerness to strengthen ties with countries that experience similar challenges without relying on the United States to serve as its interlocutor. As a Peña Nieto spokesperson noted, the purpose of this trip is to bolster “the position that Mexico has in the region and the possibilities that it has as a country to build itself as a facilitator” in Latin America. Notably, President Felipe Calderón used such an approach to carve out a leadership role not with the United States nor with the Organization of American States, but with other neighbors in the Americas and new multilateral forums such as CELAC, the 33-member Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. The Mexican press has characterized this tour as one that will “consolidate a sense of brotherhood in the region.” But this not so subtle agenda also suggests a more deliberate effort to reduce the impact of Mexican dependence on U.S. dominance in security, counternarcotics, and trade matters—especially as Mexico negotiates to become part of the extra-hemispheric Trans-Pacific Partnership. Notably, he did not visit any of the ALBA countries. Even so, Mexico’s new president seems to be signaling to regional colleagues and countrymen not only that he intends to lead, but also that he is willing to learn from neighbors when he enters Los Pinos on December 1, 2012. —Johanna Mendelson Forman

In the News

Caribbean: Dominican Republic

Dominican Republic vice president Margarita Cedeño spoke at a meeting coordinated by the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) to create a common agenda between Central American nations and the Caribbean. The meeting was the inaugural meeting of Presidents and Prime Ministers for the Regional Integration of Latin America. Cedeño articulated her conviction that
One project is a locally-staffed factory to create a nutritional supplement with locally cultivated peanuts. Agustín Filippo noted advances, such as major reductions in days needed to register a business (from 1,100 days to 10) and obtain construction permits (down from 180 days to 60). But he warned that risks in Haiti still favor more experienced investors, as newcomers may not be able to overcome some of the more serious challenges. Even so, he added that the IDB is working with the government to cut those risks.

**Central America: Honduras**

As Panama’s canal expansion project nears completion in 2014, neighboring countries have announced plans for interoceanic thruways. Honduras revealed a railroad extension scheme to connect Puerto Castilla in the north with Amapala on the Gulf of Fonseca that would move cargo from ships too large to pass through the new Panama Canal. —**La Tribuna** (Honduras)

**Nicaragua**

A contender for an interoceanic canal as far back as 1825, Nicaragua has now reportedly signed a memorandum of understanding with a Hong Kong–based telecom company to fund and build a new transitway. Costs, which are estimated at $30 billion, would cover the development of a waterway as well as a “dry canal” railroad for freight. Uncertainties surround the project, including a question of ownership and the telecom’s lack of heavy construction experience. —**Nicaragua Dispatch** (Nicaragua)

**North America: Mexico**

Former Mexican presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador left the PRD (Democratic Revolution Party) in early September to take over the little-known Movement for National Regeneration (Morena) and turn it into a high-profile personal political vehicle. López Obrador, or AMLO as he is known, confirmed at a recent rally that, like him, Morena will refuse to acknowledge the presidential victory of Enrique Peña Nieto. —**El País** (Spain)

**South America: Brazil**

Brazilian deputy finance minister Nelson Barbosa said that the Brazilian government is considering measures to combat appreciation of the Brazilian real in the wake of the U.S. Federal Reserve measures to allow the U.S. dollar to decline in strength. Barbosa indicated that the Brazilian government is ready to take action if excess U.S. liquidity begins to hurt Brazilian exports through an appreciating real. —**Exame** (Brazil)

**Colombia**

Mexican drug cartels are active in trafficking minerals, specifically coltan (columbite-tantalite ore), from which tantalum is used to make capacitors for electronic devices from cellphones to missile control systems. A Colombian police investigation recently revealed that Mexican cartels have partnered with Colombian bandits to smuggle ore from Brazil to sell it on the international black market for a high profit. —**Semana** (Colombia)