



Weekly



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Americas Weekly Summary - May 1-7, 2024

Highlights of the Week

This report reviews notable events this week in the Americas. This includes an Islamist terror threat against upcoming the T20 Cricket World Cup in the **Americas**; persisting armed violence involving the EMC-FARC in **Colombia**; **Colombian** President Petro severing diplomatic ties with Israel; the death of three tourists during an alleged vehicle theft in Baja California, **Mexico**; Jose Raul Mulino winning **Panama's** presidential elections; and the ongoing pro-Palestinian campus protests in the **USA**.

Americas

Current Situation:

- Per May 3 reports, Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) warned against a potential terror threat at T20 cricket World Cup.
- IMPACS reportedly cites an allegedly pro-Islamic State (IS) Pakistan-based group Nashir-e-Pakistan's online post warning "people indulging in amusement would ultimately face the day of reckoning".
- The tournament's fixtures are in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and the USA, between June 1-29.

Assessments & Forecast: While the veracity of Nashir-e-Pakistan's post remains unconfirmed, the warning aligns with the latent Islamist terror threat against major international events, especially in the West amid escalating tensions in Middle East. This is reflected in IS Khorasan Province (ISKP) propaganda posters calling for attacks targeting footballs stadiums in Europe hosting Champions League events in April. That said, Islamist groups do not have a strong network in the Americas, thereby limiting the overall threat to the cricket event. The threat from lone-wolf sympathizers cannot be ruled out, particularly in the USA, where IS propaganda may increase capitalizing on the March 22 attack in Moscow, as indicated in the [April 6 arrest](#) of an individual for planning attack at multiple churches in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Bolstered security arrangements, including patrols, online threat monitoring, and screenings, can be anticipated during the tournament as a precaution, particularly ahead of high-profile fixtures involving India and Pakistan, the opening ceremony before the Canada-USA fixture in Dallas, TX on June 1, and the final in Bridgetown, Barbados on June 29.

Colombia

Current Situation:

- On May 6, the 'Dagoberto Ramos' substructure of the Estado Mayor Central of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia dissident group (EMC-FARC) attacked a military patrol with explosives, killing two soldiers and injuring two others in Silvia, Cauca.
- Per May 5 reports, members of the 'Jamie Martinez' substructure EMC-FARC imposed mobility restrictions including a 19:00 (local time) curfew in La Argentina and La Plata municipalities in Huila.
- Additionally, armed clashes between EMC-FARC dissidents and the army in Cauca's Argelia and Toribio municipalities left four soldiers dead on May 3, after which five suspects were arrested.

Assessments & Forecast: The incidents reflect the escalating risk of recurring clashes in the region after EMC-FARC's leader Ivan Mordisco withdrew from peace talks on April

16 and President Gustavo Petro's announcement on May 5 of increasing offensives against EMC-FARC in Cauca. Additionally, the imposition of the curfew and related restrictions underscores the ongoing efforts of EMC-FARC to exert control over civilian populations in Huila in attempts of establishing a stronghold. This, coupled with recent extortion-related explosive attacks attributed to EMC-FARC dissidents targeting businesses on April 17 and April 6 in Neiva, along with clashes with military forces across Huila and Tolima on March 23-26, reflects the group's strategic relocation to departments neighboring Cauca, Narino, and Valle del Cauca. Consequently, and given the deployment of military forces in Cauca, Caqueta, and Tolima to reinforce security, there is an increased likelihood of armed confrontations as security forces attempt to mitigate EMC-FARC's foothold on Huila and Tolima.

Colombia & Israel

Current Situation:

- On May 1, President Gustavo Petro announced the severance of diplomatic relations with Israel, effective from May 2, citing the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict and labeling Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu "genocidal."
- Colombia's Defense Minister stated that existing contracts with Israel will be honored, including for Kfir fighter maintenance and missile systems. A "transition" committee is being formed to diversify suppliers and potentially develop a replacement for the Israeli-made Galil rifle.

Assessments & Forecast: The decision aligns with the Petro-led administration's hostile stance towards Israel since the conflict, characterized by Bogota suspending the purchase of Israeli weapons on February 29 and expelling Israel's ambassador on October 16, 2023, and marks a notable escalation in bilateral tensions since October 2023. As of now, the move is likely to present minimal repercussions for bilateral trade, with Israel contributing to less than one percent of Colombia's non-defense imports and exports. Conversely, the impact on Colombia's defense industry is anticipated to be profound, considering Colombia's reliance on Israeli rifles and military planes, potentially impeding security operations against guerrilla groups. Moreover, Colombia's potential suspension of the 2020 Colombia-Israel Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which remains speculative, could have significant implications. This could include Israel halting investments in technology, knowledge-based services, tech entrepreneurship, pharmaceuticals, industry, and cybersecurity within Colombia. According to former Finance Minister Restrepo, this scenario could entail potential economic losses exceeding 1 billion USD, affecting key sectors like industry and agribusiness. Travel between the two countries is unlikely to be disrupted, with reports stating that Israeli citizens are not having any issues entering

Colombia via air.

Mexico

Current Situation:

- As per May 5 reports, three dead bodies found in a well near Santo Tomas, Baja California were identified as those of two Australian nationals and one US national who were reported missing on April 27.
- On May 1, authorities arrested three suspects, two with drugs and one carrying the victims' cellphones, for their alleged involvement in the crime. Forensic evidence suggests that victims died while resisting the theft of tires from their pickup trucks.
- Following authorities' announcement of the discovery of the bodies, residents of Ensenada port city, located approximately 45km from the crime scene, held a protest denouncing the violence in the region on May 5.

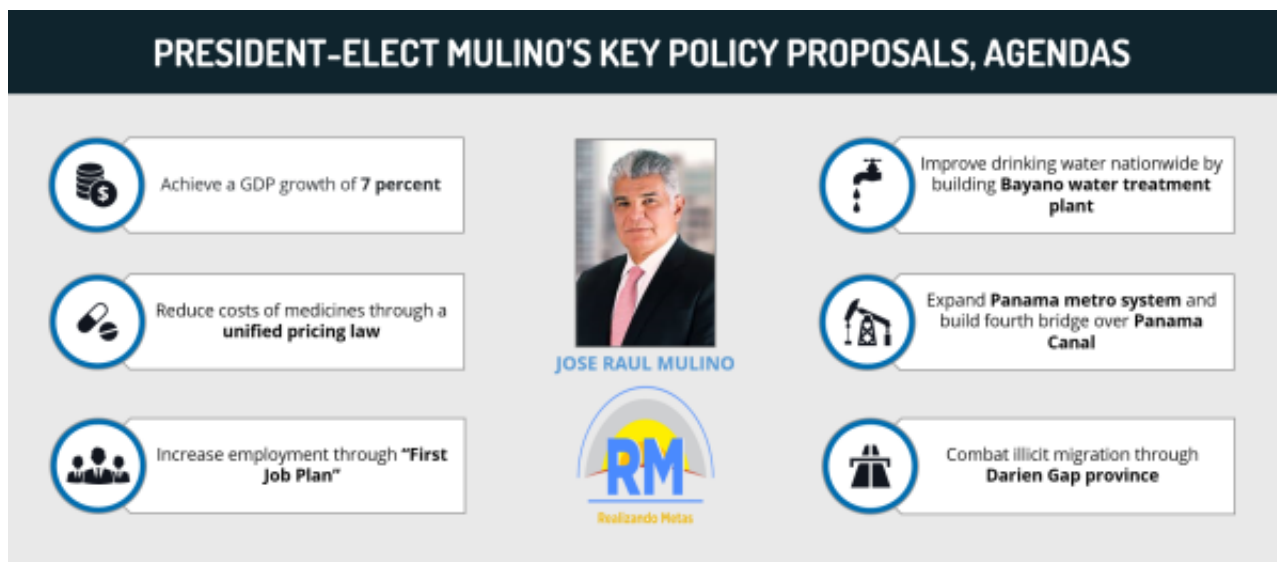
Assessments & Forecast: The incident reflects a recurrent trend of armed robberies and vehicle thefts along major roadways and highways across Baja California, as evidenced by the state recording the highest number of vehicle thefts among all states in 2023 and vehicle theft in the state increasing by 7.9 percent in January-February, compared to the same period in 2023. Although criminal groups occasionally target foreign nationals and tourists due to perceived wealth, they rarely escalate into violence, with escalation usually stemming from the victims attempting to resist the robbery. While the threat of violent crime is expected to remain substantially higher for locals rather than foreign nationals, there nevertheless remains the possibility of criminals targeting foreigners due to expectations of wealth. Moreover, considering that crimes towards locals are rarely investigated, protests are liable in response to high-profile crimes, as seen in Ensenada on May 5.

Panama

Current Situation:

- On May 5, Jose Raul Mulino from the right-wing conservative Realizando Metas y Alianza party won the Presidential elections. Ricardo Lombana from the big-tent Partido Movimiento Camino stood second by a 25 percent margin. Mulino will take office on July 1.

Assessments & Forecast: Partido Revolucionario Democratico, the ruling party secured a mere 5.8 percent of votes for its candidate Gabriel Carrizo, starkly contrasting with Mulino securing 35 percent of the votes. This reflects heightened popularity for Mulino's "hardline" crime and migration policies. While Mulino's policies regarding Panama Canal's regularization and curbing illicit migration through Darien Gap, along the Colombian border enjoy public approval, apprehensions over his handling of public demonstrations may persist. This is supported by the criticism Mulino faced for alleged police repression during a 2010 protest by Indigenous banana growers, resulting in two fatalities and 100 injuries in Bocas del Toro and Chiriqui provinces. Divisive vote share among Mulino's adversaries, including Lombana and Martin Torrijos with 16 percent, and Romulo Roux with 12 percent, may lead to polarization in Congress due to lack of a clear majority. Separately, Mulino inherits a 50 billion USD-national debt, social security system nearing insolvency, and Cobre mine's closure following the Supreme Court declaring it unconstitutional. To mitigate the economic hurdles posed by these, Mulino could renegotiate the mining contract, aligning with his pro-business policies, stimulating the promised seven percent GDP growth with increased foreign investment. Given this, large-scale protests over environmental concerns related to the mining contract, as witnessed in October 2023, may recur.



Current Situation:

- On May 2, police dismantled encampments and conducted 210 arrests at the University of California, Los Angeles and 20 arrests at Portland State University.
- Per May 3 reports, an alleged anarchist website published a post outlining a risk matrix for pro-Palestinian protestors across university campuses, involving methods such as occupying buildings, arming themselves, and pressurizing the cops.

Assessments & Forecast: The nature of the police response, which includes forcible dispersal measures and prompt arrests, underscores heightened security concerns about protests escalating into unrest. The post and the alleged anarchist network's increasing online engagement suggest growing involvement of radical left-wing groups in the ongoing pro-Palestinian protests on university campuses, both via online propaganda and on-ground mobilization, to heighten pressure on the President Joe Biden-led government against its perceived pro-Israel stance. New York City officials noting 30 percent and 60 percent of those arrested at Columbia University and City College of New York demonstrations, respectively, were "outside agitators", as of May 2, and the arrest of a long-term anarchist activist, lends credence to the same. The network propagating the use of plywood, metal sheeting, garbage cans, water barrels, among other raw materials, amid protests underscores higher risk of unrest escalating amid campus protests, with similar rudimentary yet disruptive tactics used during demonstrations at Columbia University on May 1 and at Portland State University on May 2. That Columbia University, which has been the focal point of protests, among others, have graduations ceremonies in May, pro-Palestinian campus protests are expected to continue in the near term.

Other Developments

- In **Argentina**, May 3 reports indicate a decline in press freedom under President Milei, citing news agency closures, leading to a drop in rankings from the 40th to 66th place.
- In **Canada**, police arrested three Indian-origin individuals in Edmonton, AB on May 3. The suspects are charged with the June 2023 murder of Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Surrey, BC.
- In **Chile**, the leader of Coordinadora Arauca Malleco (CAM) radical Mapuche group, Hector Llaitul, was sentenced to 23 years in prison after being found guilty of usurpation, theft, disturbing public order, and attacks against authorities on May 7.
- In **Ecuador**, five armed suspects entered a private school in Balerio Estacio, Guayaquil, Guayas province on May 6, demanding approximately 5,000 USD to avoid violence against staff and students.
- In **Mexico**, 308 polling station officials in Tabasco resigned due to prevailing insecurity, according to an announcement by the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE) on May 5.

- In **Trinidad & Tobago**, two unidentified individuals allegedly attacked and attempted to rob a German national who was trekking from Toco to Icacos on May 1.
- The **US** has halted an ammunition shipment to **Israel** amid the rising pressure over the military offensive in Rafah, Gaza, as per a May 5 report.

The Week Ahead

- **May 8:** Ascension Day in **Americas**
- **May 9:** Nationwide CGT-led strike and associated protests in **Argentina**
- **May 9:** Nationwide teachers' union strike in **Guyana**
- **May 10:** Mother's Day in **El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico**
- **May 10:** March in support of Attorney General Diana Salazar in Guayaquil, **Ecuador**
- **May 10:** Nationwide protests by Searching Mothers of Missing people in **Mexico**
- **May 12:** Mother's Day in **Americas**
- **May 13:** Protest for national security in Santiago, **Chile**
- **May 14:** Presidential Democratic and Republican Primaries in Maryland, Nebraska, and West Virginia, **USA**