

Ecuador: Expected Violence

By: Arnaldo Musa / Special for CubaSi
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The panorama couldn't be more gruesome for Daniel Noboa, the newly minted center-left president who came to power with the support of the right and is now constructively supported by his Correism opponents.

A year 2023 that closes with a record number of more than 7,000 murders, including a presidential candidate and two other political leaders at the hands of criminal mafia that thrives in and around the State; and a 2024 where the fight for control of drug trafficking hits the weak official structures, some of them very permissive due to the very present and ossified corruption from previous governments.

The state of expression decreed by Noboa was to be expected before a situation that's out of his hands and where he cannot have any setback or weakness with the mafia entity that controls prisons, murders rivals and jailers and settles its differences in the streets of the country main cities, including the assault on a television channel.

Latin American governments have expressed their solidarity and the United States offered "its good advice," while journalists not sympathetic to Correism admitted that this situation had its origin in the government of Lenín Moreno and worsened in the barely two-year-government of Guillermo Lasso.

RECENT EVENTS

Ecuador enters its third day of terror this Wednesday. After the country's president, Daniel Noboa, decreed a state of emergency and curfew, police officers kidnappings, car fires and other attacks were reported on Monday; but the violence did not stop and on Tuesday there were more criminal actions.

Early on, a video circulated on social media, attributed to criminals who had kidnapped three police officers in the city of Machala, in southwestern Ecuador. There, they read a statement in which they threaten Noboa: "You declared war and you are going to have war, you thought with your feet and it's time to assume the consequences of your mistakes [...] You declared a state of exception, we declare spoils of war to civil and military police, anyone found on the street after 11:00 at night will be executed."

In the afternoon, the act that most alarmed the population was recorded. It involved the takeover of the TC Televisión channel, located in the city of Guayaquil, in the province of Guayas. The hooded and armed criminals held workers hostage, an action that was broadcast live for at least 15 minutes.

Dozens of journalists and cameramen asked for help through chat groups in the National Police and the integrated security service ECU 911. Journalist José Luis Calderón even had guns pointed at his head and then a stick of dynamite was placed in his pocket. Meanwhile, the communicator asked on his knees that no harm be done to him.

The editor-in-chief of the newsreel, Alina Manrique, told The Associated Press what she experienced: "They put a gun to my head. I have suffered. I am panicked. I thought about my entire life, about my two children."

Minutes after the emergency occurred, the National Police reported that they intervened at the scene, evacuated the people and captured the criminals. The institution confirmed that a total of 13 people were arrested.

Towards the afternoon, the Police reported a total of eight dead and two injured during the violent day in Guayaquil, El Universo reported.

While this was happening, a new decree from Noboa came to light, which modified the one issued on Monday and in which he recognized that there's an "domestic armed conflict" in the country. Through this decree, the president identifies several transnational organized crime groups as "terrorist organizations and belligerent non-state actors."

These groups are: Águilas ÁguilasKiller, AK47, Caballeros Oscuros, honeKiller, Choneros, Corvicheros, Cuartel de las Feas, Cubanos, Fatales, Gánster, Kater Piler, Lagartos, Latin Kings, Lobos, Los p.27, Los Tiburones, Mafia 18, Mafia Trébol, Patrones, R7 and Tiguerones.

"I have ordered the Armed Forces to carry out military operations to neutralize these groups," said Noboa.

Subsequently, the Secretary General of Communication of the Presidency, Roberto Izurieta, notified that the Public and State Security Council was installed, "to analyze the situation in the country."

The culmination of all these events is the crisis in penitentiaries. Since Monday, inmates in several prisons have been holding prison officers.

This situation arose a day after the escape of José Adolfo Macías Villamar, alias 'Fito', leader of the Los Choneros criminal gang and who has been linked to the Mexican Sinaloa Cartel, who was in a maximum security at the Regional Prison, in Guayas province.

He was joined by Fabricio Colón Pico, leader of a cell of Los Lobos criminal group, who was captured early last Friday and escaped from the Riobamba prison, in the province of Chimborazo, just three days later. This man was accused by the Attorney General of Ecuador, Diana Salazar, of being behind a plan to attack her and her family.

CROSSING THE TEES

Former president Rafael Correa expressed his full support for Noboa's security policy, and called for unity after denouncing the infiltration of organized crime in the Ecuadorian State.

After the declaration of the domestic armed conflict made by the president, in response to the escalation of violence carried out by drug trafficking mafias, Correa asserted that the current crisis is not Noboa's responsibility, "who has been in office for six weeks," but rather of his predecessors Lenín Moreno and Guillermo Lasso, and reiterated that both allowed the infiltration of organized crime within the State.

"This is not by chance, they allowed it for so many years, because their focus was on trying to destroy us as a political alternative and they allowed everything," said the former president, who also launched his attacks against "the corrupt press" that, in his opinion, pushed to accelerate the dismantling of the State.

The politician, who twice held the presidency of Ecuador, acknowledged, according to Sputnik, that there has always been organized crime in the nation, however, the "crucial difference" is that now there's an "infiltration of the Armed Forces and the Police".

Along those lines, he added: "Not only did they infiltrate, but they dominate the prison system and from there direct organized crime, and that's why, when President Noboa wanted to bring order, he had that response."

In turn, Russia Today reported that previously he had expressed his firm support for Noboa, with a firm call for national unity: "All support, president. Organized crime has declared war on the State and the State must emerge victorious. "It's time for national unity."

Likewise, the politician made several recommendations to the president, who recently got into power : "Replace with civilian personnel or retired police officers the thousands of police officers who are absurdly in bureaucratic positions and send them to the streets. The Homeland will triumph. Untill victory forever!", he stated.

In conversation with RT, the leader of the Citizen Revolution considered that he had never witnessed such a dizzying destruction of a country, "without sanctions and without a blockade", after remembering that just in 2017, Ecuador was the second safest nation in the region:

"Today we are the fifth most violent in the world and we have organized crime leaders who have declared war on the State."

In this regard, he recalled that his government managed to keep organized crime at bay "without foreign bases and without help from other countries."

Although Correa advocated giving a boost to Noboa in the midst of the situation, he considered that some of the measures announced by the current government, such as the construction of megaprisons to emulate Nayib Bukele's controversial policies, are "just marketing."

"It's selling smoke," said the former president, who considered it more effective to place signal jammers in prisons, tighten controls for entry into prisons and, even more so, purge the officials in charge of these tasks.

For this reason, he reiterated his call to the president to make a profound transformation within the State to remove the mafias that, in his opinion, have entrenched themselves with the support of corrupt officials within the public forces.

In his final convocation , he called to "redouble our efforts" and not only in 2024, but in the years to come.

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff
