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Jorge Elbaum

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## ***Honest Republicans: Paraguay, Uruguay and Ecuador as Expressions of Espionage, Corruption and Drug Trafficking***

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**Guillermo Lasso, Mario Abdo y Luis Alberto Lacalle Pou**

The three South American countries that remain allied to the designs proposed by Washington, and that at the last CELAC Summit raised their affinity with the Organization of American States (OAS), are going through various political scandals linked to state corruption, the and the increase in the criminal capacities of drug trafficking.

In Uruguay, the head of the presidential custody has been detained since last September accused of granting passports to a drug trafficker, carrying out espionage activities on the head of the trade union center (PIT-CNT), opposition senators – who are investigating privatizations in port areas – and the president's ex-wife, Luis Lacalle Pou, among other crimes.

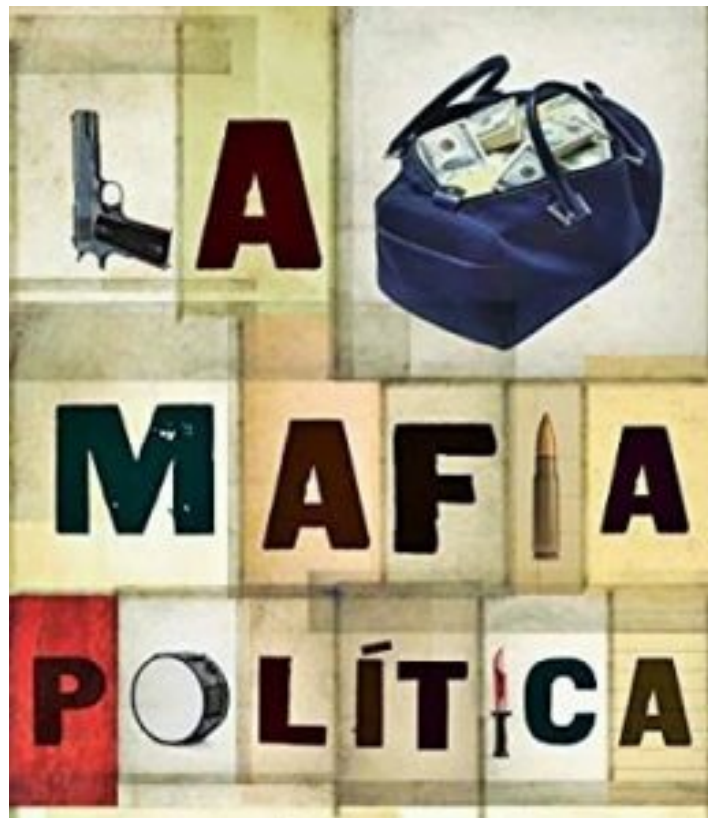


The custodian Alejandro Astesiano and the Uruguayan president Luis Lacalle Pou.

In Paraguay, where elections will be held next April to replace the neoliberal president Mario Abdo Benítez, one of the candidates of the ruling Colorado Party, the current Vice President Hugo Velázquez, had to resign his candidacy before the accusations in the United States of links with money laundering networks from drug trafficking, one of them led by a family linked to the evangelist pastor José Insfrán.

Another candidate for the Guarani presidency is the confidant of the unrepresentable former Argentine president Mauricio Macri, Horacio Cartes, who appears leading the polls. The tobacco businessman and soccer leader was also listed as "*significantly corrupt*" by the State Department, considering him responsible for smuggling activities and financial ties to criminal organizations.

In the case of Uruguay, Lacalle Pou is going through the most serious political scandal since the recovery of democracy in that country: on December 26 – veiled by an extraordinary media shield throughout Latin America – the eastern president declared four hours before the prosecutor Gabriela Fossati, in the framework of an investigation related to the head of his custody. Alejandro Astesiano, who had been detained since September 26, accused of influence peddling, falsification of public documents, illegal espionage and complicity in the granting of the passport to drug trafficker Sebastián Marset Cabrera. Cabrera is considered by Interpol as the leader of the *First Uruguayan Cartel*, which was investigated by Paraguayan prosecutor Marcelo Pecci in the framework of the operation known as A Ultranza Py, in which a total of 2022 properties and warehouses, a sports complex, an airport hangar, nine livestock establishments were seized until February 71. 6,000 head of cattle, 41 tractors and 9 agricultural machinery, 30 trucks, 48 motorcycles, 27 high-end cars, seven boats, a helicopter, 13 aircraft and 21,029 kilograms of cocaine hydrochloride. Prosecutor Pecci was killed on May 10, 2022 in Colombia while enjoying his honeymoon.



Last Friday, February 10, Miguel Ángel Insfran, brother of the Paraguayan pastor and at the same time partner of Sebastián Marset Cabrera, the beneficiary of the subordinates of Astesiano, was arrested in Rio de Janeiro.

Astesiano was arrested in September at the headquarters of the presidential residence, after having returned from a vacation in Costa Rica, where he accompanied Lacalle Pou's family. Since his arrest, the official linked to the security forces has been adding charges against him. Weeks ago, conversations between the guard and members of the Police were disseminated, in which the illegal espionage carried out against Marcelo Abdala, president of the Uruguayan trade union center, in the framework of a car accident without any victims or injuries was evident.

On that occasion, Astesiano illegally used the surveillance camera system, in collusion with the President's private secretary, Nicolás Martínez. In conversations that were leaked – between Astesiano and Martínez – the former is heard encouraging harassment by demanding that *"now Nico (Lacalle Pou's secretary) has come the time for us to kill him. He must be killed. Let them put the batteries there, you have to kill this son of a bitch."*

After the leak of the conversations between the custodian and the private secretary, the PIT-CNT released a statement in which it said: *"The use of the state apparatus to intimidate and persecute citizens, political adversaries and social activists, reminds us of the darkest times of our recent history that we do not want to repeat again. We will be attentive to the evolution of these situations, evaluating the political and / or legal actions at national and international level necessary for the defense of democracy, the republic and freedoms."*



The ultraconservative presidents of Uruguay and Ecuador, Luis Lacalle Pou and Guillermo Lasso with high unpopularity rates due to their inefficient management of government, marked by a great neoliberal accent.

*Spying, chasing, harassing*

The espionage operations against Abdala are added to those carried out against opposition senators Charles Carrera, Mario Bergara and Enrique Rubio, belonging to the Broad Front, who demanded the reopening of an investigation regarding possible crimes related to the extension of the concession period to the Belgian company Katoen Natie, holder of logistics rights within a terminal specialized in containers in the port of Montevideo.

The practice of illegal espionage – so dear to the Latin American right – reached in the case of Uruguay, similar to Argentina, the relatives of Lacalle Pou. Among the leaks that incriminate Astesiano is also the follow-up of his ex-wife, Lorena Ponce de León. These activities are reminiscent of the criminal investigations carried out by Mauricio Macri in Argentina against his own sister and his then brother-in-law.

The activities of Lacalle Pou's confidant include forgery of passports to benefit 195 Russian citizens in exchange for succulent handouts. On February 8, the eastern president decided to decapitate the police leadership linked to Astesiano, which came to benefit the custodian to prevent the general director of Business Inspection, Henry de León, from fining an unauthorized company, owned by the Astesiano.



*A banker questioned and delegitimized*



The Ecuadorian banker-president Guillermo Lasso Mendoza, politically finished after the categorical defeat in the sectional elections of February 5.

The Ecuadorian right also has events that the structural media shield seeks to make invisible, omit or minimize. On Sunday, February 5, Ecuador's sectional elections were held, in which the Citizen Revolution Party, led by former President Rafael Correa Delgado from exile, triumphed in the most significant geographical areas of the country. The current president and questioned banker, Guillermo Lasso Mendoza, also failed in the eight constitutional amendments proposed to the population – one of them linked to the extradition of drug traffickers to the United States – collecting a 60% rejection.

Organized crime linked to the commercialization of narcotics has increased exponentially since Lasso became president and declared war on drug traffickers. This militarization program recalls the increase in violence that occurred during the Mexican government of spurious former President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012), when the maximum

responsibility in the confrontation with the drug cartels was led by the head of Public Security (SSP), Genaro García Luna.

Luna is currently being held in the United States and on trial for receiving bribes from the Sinaloa cartel, led by Joaquin "*El Chapo*" Guzman Loera. The trial is held in Brooklyn, is in charge of Magistrate Brian Cogan and it is believed that the jury will begin deliberating in the coming days. Among the possible witnesses is Felipe Calderón himself.



Genaro García Luna (tried in a New York court), former Secretary of Public Security of the spurious former Mexican President Felipe Calderón

One of the tragic events of the election in Ecuador was the assassination of the candidate for mayor of Puerto López, Omar Menéndez, belonging to Correísmo. What the media silence is that this crime was prolonged by the murder of Julio César Farachio, candidate for mayor of Salinas. Both were executed by hitmen linked to drug trafficking. Ecuador is facing an unprecedented crime wave as a result of the progressive infiltration of groups linked to Mexican cartels.

In recent months, the conflict has deepened as a result of the arrival of representatives of Colombian paramilitary groups that lost the protection of the Bogotá government since leftist leader Gustavo Petro assumed the Presidency of the Republic. It is estimated that in the last five years, 120 informal ports have been installed throughout the west coast of Ecuador, of groups that usually launder these assets with the collaboration of contracts offered by the CREO Movement, the party of Guillermo Lasso.

The crisis unleashed by the violence motivated, within the National Assembly, the constitution of an Investigative Commission on drug trafficking activities. For the formation of this instance, however, the members of the Citizen Revolution party (correísmo) were excluded. It is not a question, said sources investigated in Quito, that the

spurious links between financial agents close to the government and the laundering demanded by drug trafficking are discovered.

*'The honest and honest Republicans'* of Latin America and the Caribbean seem to be the most complete expression of Seneca's sentence: *"No one can wear the disguise for long."* What they presume – it is increasingly evident – is exactly what they lack.

*Jorge Elbaum for La Pluma*

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