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THEDIALOGUE

FEATURED Q&A

Why Is Ecuador's Government Reining in Assange?

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has been holed up inside Ecuador's embassy in London since 2012. // File Photo: Ecuadorean Government.

Q Ecuador's government said Oct. 18 it had partly restricted Internet access for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has lived in asylum in the Andean nation's London embassy for more than four years. WikiLeaks has been in headlines most recently for revealing emails aimed at embarrassing U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Why has Ecuador, whose leader, Rafael Correa, often locks ideological horns with the United States, taken steps to restrict Assange now? Are Assange's days under Ecuador's protection numbered? What has been the role of the United States and other international actors in the latest developments?

A Francisco Borja Cevallos, Ecuador's ambassador to the United States: "Ecuador granted political asylum to Julian Assange in July 2012 because it considered that the situation had the required merits, and Ecuador has a long history of granting asylum to those persecuted for political reasons. Ecuador still believes the current underlying circumstances merit the asylum and will continue to safeguard his rights. In February, a United Nations panel determined that Assange's time in the embassy in London amounts to an 'arbitrary detention.' Recently, Ecuador decided to temporarily restrict his access to the Internet following the decision to publish documents that have an impact on the election in the United States. The decision to publish those documents is the sole responsibility of WikiLeaks and its members. The government of Ecuador respects the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other countries; it does not interfere in the electoral processes in progress, nor does it support a candidate in particular.

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Conservatives, Fringe Candidates Prevail in Brazil Local Elections

Voters on Sunday clobbered mainstream parties, including the Workers' Party of ousted President Dilma Rousseff.

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ECONOMIC

APEC Has Boosted Peru's Trade: Araoz

The country's trade with members of APEC has increased 14 percent since it became a member of the bloc in 1998, said Mercedes Araoz, Peru's second vice president.

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POLITICAL

Colombia's Santos Wants New Peace Deal by Christmas

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos said he wants a renegotiated peace deal with the FARC rebels by Christmas. Voters rejected his government's peace accord with the FARC on Oct. 2.

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Santos // File Photo: Colombian Government.

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POLITICAL NEWS

Mainstream Parties Clobbered in Brazil's Second-Round Vote

Brazilian voters on Sunday ousted mainstream politicians in favor of conservative and fringe candidates in a second round runoff election, The Wall Street Journal reported. In one of the most closely watched races, Marcelo Crivella, a senator and evangelical bishop, took 59 percent of the vote to win in Rio de Janeiro.

Crivella // File Photo: Crivella Campaign.

Crivella painted his rival, Marcelo Freixo, as a socialist radical aligned with impeached Workers' Party President Dilma Rousseff. Evangelical candidates had made significant gains in the first round of voting earlier this year, and Crivella, with his Brazilian Republican Party, or PRB, were among those to benefit from a new electoral dynamic. The other major contest was in Belo Horizonte, capital of the second-most-populous state, Minas Gerais, where soccer club manager Alexandre Kalil of the little-known Humanist Solidarity Party defeated a candidate with the conservative Brazilian Social Democracy Party. The center-right Brazilian Democratic Movement Party of President Michel Temer failed to gain ground on Sunday, poll results show. Covering 18 state capital cities and 39 other larger cities with more than 200,000 citizens, the election of 2016 has given the center-right PSDB, which hasn't held the presidency since Fernando Henrique Cardoso left office in 2002, the largest share of the country's population it has held yet this century, Folha de S.Paulo reported today. With victories in 28 of the 92 of the largest cities in the country, PSDB mayors will administer municipalities with nearly 24 percent of the country's population.

Venezuela's Maduro Enters Talks With Part of Opposition

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro on Sunday night began talks with some members of the country's opposition coalition in a dialogue sponsored by the Vatican, the Associated Press reported. Fifteen parties belonging to the coalition, the Democratic Unity Roundtable, boycotted the talks, saying they would not engage with the government until it released several imprisoned opposition members and reversed a decision to halt an effort to schedule a referendum to recall Maduro. "For an eventual dialogue to take place it has to be very clear from the outset that the aim is agreeing on the terms of a democratic transition in the remainder of 2016," the parties said in a statement, the AP reported. Many of Maduro's opponents have voiced concerns that the Vatican-led talks may be a stalling tactic aimed at easing pressure on Maduro. The president said at the opening of the talks at a museum in western Caracas that he has an "absolute commitment" to holding talks with the opposition. "We're giving a chance to disarm the hatred, the intolerance, and open the door to love among the Venezuelans," Maduro said in televised remarks. Former presidents of Panama, the Dominican Republic, Spain and a mediator from the Vatican were on hand as the talks began. In addition to halting the opposition's effort to schedule a recall referendum against Maduro, Venezuela's National Electoral Council, which the opposition sees as loyal to Maduro, also delayed the country's gubernatorial elections

Many of Maduro's opponents have voiced concerns that the talks may be a stalling tactic.

NEWS BRIEFS

El Salvador's Saca Arrested on Corruption Allegations

Former Salvadoran President Tony Saca was arrested Saturday on allegations of illicit enrichment, unlawful association and money laundering, the Associated Press reported. Prosecutors say that Saca, who held office from 2004 to 2009 with the conservative Nationalist Republican Alliance, has not explained the origins of some $6.5 million in assets he acquired during his time in office. Saca and two of the six other suspects named by prosecutors were arrested at the wedding of one of Saca's children, according to the report.

Choice Aire to Begin Nonstop New Orleans-Honduras Flights

Choice Aire, a Miami-based public charter company, on Friday said it will begin offering new nonstop flights from New Orleans to Honduras starting in December, the Times-Picayune reported. Operated by XTRA Airways, the flights will leave on Wednesdays and Saturdays from Louis Armstrong airport to Ramón Villeda Morales International Airport using 150-seat Boeing 737-400 for the approximately three-hour flight. The company's chief executive, Danny Looney, said the flights will cater to both business and leisure travelers.

Costa Rica's Vehicle Insurance Rates to Rise in November

Vehicle insurance rates in Costa Rica are set to rise beginning Tuesday, the Tico Times reported. The country's National Insurance Institute said the cost of automobile insurance policies, which represent a fifth of the cost of the "marchamos" insurance permits, will rise 6.8 percent to about $39, while motorcycle owners will have to pay 5.2 percent more, or about $109.

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that had been scheduled for December until the middle of next year. Tens of thousands of Venezuelans took to the streets last week in protest amid a backdrop of severe economic problems including shortages of basic goods such as food and medicine and an inflation rate that is expected to surpass 700 percent this year. Another opposition-led rally is expected for Thursday in Caracas. This month, the opposition-controlled National Assembly also voted to put Maduro on trial, though the measure is largely symbolic as it does not constitutionally have the power to remove a president. Also, the country's Supreme Court, which Maduro's allies stacked with supporters late last year, has ruled lawmakers' decisions void.

Colombia's Santos Wants New Peace Deal by Christmas

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, who suffered a major defeat when voters rejected his government's peace deal with the FARC rebels, said in an interview published Saturday that he wants a new agreement by Christmas. "All the negotiators and I have met almost every organization and we are now digesting more than 500 proposals—and talking with the FARC—to have a new agreement, agreed and approved, by Christmas. That is my goal," Santos told Britain's Observer newspaper. Santos added that any delay could threaten the entire peace process. "This uncertainty is very risky, because anything could happen that could really make the process explode. So I am working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with my team to get another agreement." Santos, who has made the four-year peace talks the centerpiece of his presidency, said he was considering several options as ways to legitimize a renegotiated agreement. "Whatever mechanism I use to implement it, whether through Congress, or through municipal councils or through another plebiscite or a combination, I will decide as soon as we have a new agreement and see what would give it the best legitimacy, both politically and legally," he said.

ECONOMIC NEWS

APEC Membership Has Boosted Peru's Trade: Araoz

Peruvian trade with member economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, or APEC, has increased 14 times since the Andean country joined the group in 1998, state news agency Andina reported Sunday, citing Mercedes Araoz, the country's second vice president. Araoz, who is serving as the head of Peru's APEC High-Level Extraordinary Commission as Lima prepares to host the bloc in November, said involvement with APEC has helped expand Peru's trade with China. "Our relations have been growing, especially with China; relations were formalized thanks to APEC, and now we have a strategic partnership, which helped multiply trade," Araoz told Andina. Chinese President Xi Jinping has urged APEC members to speed up talks on the Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific, or FTAAP, which Beijing is pushing, Reuters reported earlier this month. APEC has previously approved work toward the establishment of FTAAP, which Xi said was a "historic step." However, some analysts see the initiative as a way to divert attention from the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, trade agreement backed by the United States.

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There was much speculation surrounding the decision from Ecuador to restrict his Internet access, yet Ecuador's foreign policy is solely based on sovereign decisions. Ecuadorean and Swedish competent authorities are collaborating to conduct interrogations at the embassy in London regarding the allegations against Assange."

Julio Carrión, associate professor of political science and international relations at the University of Delaware:

"There are two explanations to account for Ecuador's decision to restrict Assange's access to the Internet. The first is that there is a long Latin American tradition of granting asylum to political dissidents with the understanding that the asylee will not engage in open political activism that might embarrass the host country. The other is that Ecuador feels that it is being put in the difficult position of being an unwilling participant in the Russian campaign to meddle in the U.S. election. There is very little doubt that Assange and WikiLeaks have become active collaborators in Putin's efforts to undermine Hillary Clinton's candidacy. And Assange was using the Ecuadorean embassy in London for this purpose. It was becoming increasingly untenable for Ecuador to claim neutrality in the ongoing conflict between Russia and the United States when it was hosting such a high profile hacker. So, despite Correa's lack of enthusiasm for the Obama administration, he clearly thought

> **"There is very little doubt that Assange and WikiLeaks have become active collaborators in Putin's efforts to undermine Hillary Clinton's candidacy."**
>
> **— Julio Carrión**

that Assange was acting out of bounds with the Latin American tradition of asylum and was bringing attention to his administration at a time when he's engineering a difficult campaign to secure the election of his hand-picked successor. Did the United States put pressure on him? Both the United States and Ecuador deny such pressure. Are Assange's days of asylum in the Ecuadorean embassy numbered? I am skeptical. If Ecuador is able to curtail Assange's open meddling in the

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U.S. election, there is no reason for a harsh action that could bring criticism to Correa from many that he sees as his natural allies."

Bruno Binetti, research associate at the Inter-American Dialogue "For Ecuador, it made sense to help Assange in 2012, when WikiLeaks was revealing U.S. secret diplomatic cables and the surveillance Washington had ordered against allies and foes alike. Granting asylum to Assange allowed President Correa—a declared anti-imperialist and ally of late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez—to defy the United States and raise his own global stature at a relatively minimal cost. Today, the situation has changed. There are indications of a connection between Russia and WikiLeaks, with the alleged intention of hurting Hillary Clinton's campaign and (at least indirectly) benefiting Donald Trump, a candidate profoundly rejected in Latin America and the world for his divisive politics, and racist and sexist rhetoric. Ecuador risked being seen as intervening in U.S. domestic politics—just what Correa and others have been accusing Washington of doing in Latin America for decades. Expelling Assange from the Ecuadorean embassy in London would be a global embarrassment and the admission of a grave mistake. But with polls giving Clinton a comfortable lead over Trump only days before the election, Correa decided that Assange had become a problem to be contained. It is unlikely that Washington explicitly requested it, but Ecuador probably wants to avoid antagonizing a potential Clinton administration from the beginning. The South American country will elect a new president in 2017—Correa's chosen successor now leads the polls—amid a serious economic slump. The United States remains Ecuador's largest trading partner by far, and economic cooperation could help alleviate the ongoing crisis."

> **"Ecuador probably wants to avoid antagonizing a potential Clinton administration from the beginning."**
>
> **— Bruno Binetti**

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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