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Split Erupts in Ecuador's Leadership

by Luis Ángel Saavedra

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Every political analyst in Ecuador expected a clash between President Lenín Moreno and his vice president, Jorge Glas, but they didn't expect that it would happen just 40 days into the administration or that the vice president would be stripped of all of his responsibilities. The opposition has fingered Glas as a beneficiary of several corruption cases brought before the Supreme Court by Ecuador's attorney general ([NotiSur, July 14, 2017](#)).

Glas has pleaded not guilty to all charges. He asserts that a plot is being built to remove him from office and usher in a right-wing agenda, thus dismantling the gains achieved during the 10 years of President Rafael Correa's administration (2007-2017).

Corruption as a breaking point

Glas, who served as vice president under Correa between 2013 and 2017, was the ideal candidate to continue Correa's political project, but he lacked the votes needed to win the recent presidential contest. Moreno, on the other hand, didn't have Correa's blessing but had far greater voter support than Glas, making their alliance the only possibility the ruling Alianza País (AP) had for a victory.

Fractures inside the AP were temporarily resolved with the Moreno-Glas formula, although it is believed that Moreno was forced to accept Glas as a running mate. In the second round of voting, Glas was kept away from campaign events because he had begun to be tied to acts of corruption, particularly with a network of the Brazilian firm Odebrecht that had paid more than US\$33.5 million in bribes to Ecuadoran officials, according to a US Department of Justice investigation published on Dec. 21, 2016. The bribes were later confirmed by former Odebrecht officers who agreed to collaborate with the justice departments of the countries in which they had acted illegally over a 20-year period ([NotiSur, Feb. 24, 2017](#), and [May 26, 2017](#)).

In Ecuador, bribes were allegedly made between 2007 and 2016, during the decade in which Correa governed with Moreno, and then Glas, as vice president.

The Moreno-Glas partnership won with less than a two-point difference over the right-wing candidate, Guillermo Lasso, on April 2 ([NotiSur, Nov. 11, 2016](#), [March 10, 2017](#), [April 21, 2017](#)). Moreno then began a process of legitimizing his mandate by opening dialogues with different political sectors, both on the left and the right. Correa sent messages criticizing Moreno's actions from Belgium, where he is now living. The messages were considered a call to action for his supporters.

The tension between Moreno and Correa led Glas to defend the Correa faction and publish a letter in which he questioned Moreno's approach. In that letter, Glas defined himself as a defender of the Ecuadoran people's interests, which were about to be violated by commitments the president was accepting. He warned that Ecuador would go back to the system of political compromises that characterized the country before Correa.

President Moreno's response was resounding. He stripped Glas of all functions that he had assigned to him as vice president, leaving him only with the responsibility of replacing the president when he is out of the country. Moreno also supported the corruption accusations against Glas.

"I don't know if he is guilty, I don't have to decide," Moreno said at a public event where he received the support of the AP assembly. "The appropriate institution must now determine the truth, not as happened before, but independently. Unfortunately, Engineer Jorge Glas, unfortunately, the finger increasingly points at you."

With this statement, Moreno definitively broke with the Correa government, as he suggested that, during the previous administration, justice had not been independent.

Various AP militants tried to mediate in the conflict. They even traveled to Belgium to speak with Correa, but it was not possible to overcome the schism. As a result, several top AP members left the government, and AP members in the National Assembly are still defining positions in order to decide which group they will join.

Glas maintains innocence

Glas has maintained his innocence and argues that there isn't one piece of solid proof against him. The accusations, he says, are based on conversations between delinquents who defrauded the country or on the testimony of those responsible for the acts of corruption.

In fact, accusations against Glas come from a video of Carlos Pólit, former state comptroller general and now a fugitive because of his participation in Odebrecht's network of corruption, from Carlos Pareja, a key person in the strategic sectors that Glas headed in the last administration, and from former officers of the Brazilian company.

In these statements, Glas has been linked to an "illegal association" case in the National Court of Justice for which the National Assembly, at Glas' request, has removed his immunity so that he can stand trial. His uncle, Ricardo Rivera, the main person in the Odebrecht corruption network, has not testified against his nephew and has assumed all responsibility for the events that have been unveiled.

Public opinion is against Glas. The media accuses him and so do opposition politicians, but these accusations have become his best defense.

"Everyone has condemned me, but no one has offered an ounce of proof," Glas said. "The opinion created by the media has condemned me without a judge doing so." That is the argument he repeats at every opportunity, saying that the country is returning to "a state of opinion" in which the media act as judge and give instructions to the government, as Rafael Correa had defined it.

This accusation by the media now serves Glas, because the mass media, whose investigative units were dismantled during 10 years of government harassment, have not been able to find the evidence to link Glas to crimes of corruption, nor has the Prosecutor's Office been able to prove the accusations beyond a reasonable doubt ([NotiSur, Jan. 22, 2016](#)).

Farith Simon, a constitutional lawyer and professor at Quito's Universidad San Francisco, has said the Prosecutor's Office rushed to link Glas, without substantial proof, to the minor accusation of allowing the formation of an illicit association. Simon maintains the office should have waited for more information and for the results of the on-going investigation to make a more effective

connection. As things are, it's probable that Glas will be cleared in the case and that prosecutors won't be able to put him on trial in the future.

Departmentalization of power

Alianza País is a coalition of movements and thus was always a political hybrid, even when it defined itself as leftist. Its inner circle, which has held political leadership, is Movimiento País, the group to which Correa and most of his followers belonged. It is charged with maintaining the loyalty of the new administration.

The break between Moreno, Correa, and Glas, and the resignations of top officials who are part of Movimiento País, is a harbinger of a split between the movement with the rest of the AP. In interviews, departing officials have referred to the validity of Movimiento País and the need to consolidate it in light of the current crisis, but they have not spoken in the name of Movimiento País. This may indicate that they no longer feel like a part of the Moreno Administration or the AP.

Given the weakness of the arguments against Glas, it is probable that prosecutors won't be able to tie him to any crime and that he will hold on to the position of vice president. This will force Moreno to share power with Movimiento País and to come to a governability agreement in which they split political areas and try not to interfere with each other. If that is not possible, there could be an attempt to overthrow Moreno or failing that, to force Moreno to find a way to get rid of Glas.

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