

Mexican diplomatic offensive challenges Haig's 'body count' policy in El Salvador

by Timothy Rush

A new dynamic is emerging in the El Salvador civil war, thanks to a determined diplomatic offensive by Mexico to urge a negotiated settlement to that conflict. The contrary efforts of U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig to engineer a so-called military solution—merely another name for the Vietnamization of the region—have been sharply set back.

The turning point was the back-to-back visits of U.S. Vice-President Bush to Mexico Sept. 15-16, and Mexican President López Portillo's trip to Grand Rapids, Michigan Sept. 17 and 18 for direct talks with President Reagan. Bush, accorded an unprecedented welcome by the Mexicans in the course of Mexico's independence day celebrations, met with López Portillo privately for 80 minutes. Bush flew to Grand Rapids ahead of the Mexican party to brief Reagan on these talks. López Portillo then met with Reagan for 45 minutes the evening of Sept. 17, and for an additional hour, in the company of Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau, on Sept. 18.

Washington was buzzing over the next days that "something had happened" in the course of the visits. This became clear when Reagan met in Washington for a surprisingly short 20 minutes with Salvadoran President José Napoleón Duarte Sept. 21 and, according to administration officials, broached the subject of negotiations with him. After briefing Duarte on the Grand Rapids talks with López Portillo, Reagan specifically suggested that Duarte look at the possibility of Mexican mediation to find a negotiated settlement. A "senior administration official" quoted in the press the next day confirmed that "there was some discussion of the potential role of President López Portillo and others in the region . . . [in introducing] a mediated settlement."

This was quite a turnaround from Haig's unbending insistence that "elections," not negotiations, must be the first step in El Salvador—a sure-fire formula for exacerbated civil war. It remains to be seen how quickly and how publicly this shift gets translated into formal administration policy, but there is no question that Mexico has

successfully introduced some new thinking at the top.

This had been Mexico's intention in its recent round of diplomatic activity, kicked off by a joint communiqué with France issued Aug. 28. That communiqué had recognized the Salvadoran opposition as a "representative political force" which had to be brought into the negotiating process.

Though at first glance, the Mexican move threatened to rupture the good will that López Portillo and Reagan had established in their first two meetings this year, López Portillo carried through the diplomatic initiative deftly to actually further solidify that personal tie with Reagan, and re-establish Mexico as the key mediating force for American concerns in the region.

A series of energetic diplomatic moves along the way contributed to this result. On Sept. 13 López Portillo hosted Honduran President Policarpo Paz García to summit talks in Mexico City and showed how persuasive Mexican diplomacy can be. Though a more moderate military regime than neighboring governments such as Guatemala's, Honduras lined up with Venezuela's strong condemnation of the Mexican-French initiative, and maintains a series of military understandings with the armies of El Salvador and Guatemala which always have the potential of being activated into a single regional gendarme force.

López Portillo hailed the visiting general as a "respected military leader," extended a series of juicy economic packages Honduras's way, and extracted statements from Paz which emphasized a peaceful settlement of the region's conflicts. Most significantly, López Portillo arranged a meeting between Nicaraguan leader Jaime Wheelock and Policarpo Paz in Mexico City under his personal auspices, in which steps were taken to cool out the tense border situation between Nicaragua and Honduras.

Equally important was the swing through Mexico by Brazilian Foreign Minister Ramiro Saraiva Guerreiro, crowning Mexico's efforts to organize a middle bloc of

countries away from Venezuela's anti-Mexico crusade. Brazil, the companion "heavyweight" to Mexico on the continent, was crucial to this effort. Saraiva met with López Portillo hours before the Mexican president flew to Michigan, and then told the press that "Brazil may differ with the Mexican position on El Salvador, but we are not heading any campaign against the French-Mexican proposal for a political solution in El Salvador."

'Systematic genocide'

High-level Mexican officials told *EIR* that their concern in stopping Haig was to prevent an intensified wave of slaughter from sweeping Central America. Over 22,000 people have been killed in El Salvador since January 1980, and hundreds more are being butchered weekly—many in atrocious cult fashion by the country's right-wing death squads. Already over half a million of the country's 4.5 million people are homeless refugees either inside or outside the country. Should Haig succeed in his attempt to exacerbate the civil war, Cambodian levels of genocide will quickly result throughout the area.

Mexican officials are well aware of the fact that the man on the scene responsible for carrying out the Cambodian horror in the early 1970s, Mr. Thomas Enders, is today Haig's assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, with direct oversight and responsibility for Central America.

On Sept. 5, columnist Chao Ebergenyi of the Mexico City daily *El Sol* revealed that high Mexican officials—subsequently identified as military and interior ministry-linked individuals—were studying the Malthusian planning manual of the Carter administration, the *Global 2000 Report*, and had come to the conclusion that the implications of the document were willful murder of millions in the Third World.

On the eve of the López Portillo-Reagan meeting in Michigan, Mexican novelist and former ambassador to France Carlos Fuentes minced no words that mass murder was indeed the issue of El Salvador. "The present course of events in El Salvador will lead to large-scale extermination," he wrote in the *New York Times* Sept. 16. "The triumph of the extreme left would provoke an extreme reaction from the United States, thus inviting even more merciless repression; the triumph of the extreme right would perpetuate uncontrolled genocide. . . . Mexico has offered the U.S. a way out of the swamp."

Even more forthright was a column appearing in the Mexico City daily *El Universal*. "In its attempt to impose greater geopolitical control" over such areas as Central America, *El Universal* charged, the United States is engaging in "systematic genocide." Washington's "threatening policies" work as one package, "spanning economic pressures on the developing coun-

tries, increased interest-rate warfare, [and] the deployment of the neutron bomb."

With the shift in momentum after the López Portillo-Reagan meeting, Haig's surrogates in Latin America suddenly find themselves sinking in political quicksand.

Venezuelan President Luis Herrera Campins, who had taken the lead in following Haig's instructions and uniting other Latin American nations—most notably the Southern Cone military dictatorships—in condemnation of the Mexican-French initiative, had a hard time re-establishing credibility for Venezuela as a "Third World" leader in his Sept. 21 address to the United Nations. In desperation, he called for "independence for Puerto Rico" as Venezuela's new claim to "anti-imperialist" leadership. He was speaking as his government had yet to respond to insistent charges in Caracas that Venezuela already had troops stationed under a variety of guises in El Salvador.

Similarly scrambling was Salvadoran President Duarte, who had been brought up to Washington by Haig as a preliminary to increased U.S. aid and dispatch of outside troops to the region. After Reagan informed him that Mexico's good offices for a mediated settlement were now top on the agenda, Duarte sputtered that he would prefer "Panama, Costa Rica, or Guatemala" as the intermediaries.

The shift in direction has also given a cold bath to the Argentines who, according to Washington sources close to Haig, were preparing to increase their already significant sub rosa involvement in the Central American region.

Haig et al., however, are hardly ceding ground graciously. Two weeks after the French-Mexican communiqué, high-power bombs exploded at the Mexican consulates in Miami and New York, and the youth section of Herrera Campins's COPEI party marched through the grounds of the Mexican embassy in Caracas, defacing its walls. The Mexican embassies in Guatemala and Honduras were simultaneously attacked.

At the U.N. on Sept. 21, Herrera Campins kept up a stream of attacks on Mexico's role in Central America, and issued a barely disguised threat to unleash full-scale havoc throughout the area. The Mexicans, he argued "believing they are facilitating peace, may institutionalize war on Central American soil."

These are not idle threats, since they are fully endorsed by Haig himself. Mexican government officials fear that Haig, stymied in El Salvador, will now turn his attentions to blowing up Guatemala, which borders Mexico to the south. Conveniently at hand, should he choose to do this, is the British-orchestrated destabilization generated by the Sept. 21 independence granted to the tiny nation of Belize, whose territory is claimed by Guatemala.