

Negotiations with the Zapatistas: a Camacho coup d'état in Mexico

by Hugo López Ochoa

Mexican government negotiations with the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) ended their first phase with a total capitulation by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari to the principal demands of the narco-terrorists. Central to those demands was the Zapatistas' insistence on an extraordinary session of Congress to pass a reform of Mexican electoral law which would allegedly guarantee clean presidential elections on Aug. 21, which would reform Article 4 of the Constitution, and which would grant political, judicial, and language autonomy to the country's Indian communities.

Apart from the demands for improved health, education, and other social needs which were included on the list of 34 points conceded by the government, a key EZLN demand was that their terrorist movement be granted "belligerent" status. If Salinas did not accept this demand, the narco-terrorists said, he must resign to make way for a transition government that could guarantee compliance with the full list of demands.

Salinas did not resign nor did he grant the Zapatistas belligerent status, but, supposedly to gain time, he openly or covertly granted every other demand. The world was stunned. Never before has there been a case of a narco-terrorist group winning so much in so little time (seven weeks) without a real military force behind it and with a theater of operations limited to one state, Chiapas, which has only 3.5 million out of the country's 85 million inhabitants.

But it was the EZLN, not Salinas, which in fact gained time, since it is the EZLN which remains intact, fully armed and, according to its "Commander Marcos," ready to lead a new uprising should the results of the Aug. 21 elections not be to their liking. Or *before* Aug. 21, if hardliners from the PRI ruling party should prevail in Congress and the concessions are not fulfilled.

Foreign pressures

The truth behind the negotiations is that it was pressure from the U.S. State Department, from the non-governmental and human rights organizations financed and deployed by Anglo-American intelligence, and from private institutions financed by powerful groups of speculators and financiers such as George Soros and the Inter-American Dialogue,

which broke the President's resistance and prevented the launching of a definitive military operation against the Zapatistas.

The result is that Salinas is now a lame duck, controlled by Manuel Camacho Solís, the former foreign minister and former Mexico City mayor who was foisted upon Salinas by all of the above-named institutions for the post of "Commissioner for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas," and who now serves as the messenger of the Zapatistas' Marcos and of "Commander" Samuel Ruiz, the theology of liberation bishop from San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas and the real chieftain of the EZLN.

What has occurred in Mexico is a coup d'état, headed by Manuel Camacho Solís but with foreign backing. As the apparent architect of the negotiations, Camacho has been left with so much power that everyone is now asking if he will overthrow Carlos Salinas de Gortari; if he will replace Luis Donaldo Colosio as the ruling PRI party's presidential candidate, if he will launch himself as an independent candidate in order to defeat Colosio at the polls, or if he will use his power simply to pave the way to the presidency for Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solorzano, the presidential candidate of the Zapatista electoral arm, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

The truth is that all of these questions are redundant since, by using the EZLN as a Damocles' sword over Salinas's head, Camacho has already de facto overthrown the President, imposing his own agenda on the negotiations; he has already broken the candidacy of Luis Donaldo Colosio, by forcing the government to accept the presence of "foreign observers" at the Aug. 21 elections (something once considered taboo, because it is a violation of national sovereignty); and he has already in his hands the power to launch himself as an independent candidate whenever he wants, depending on the circumstances, or to open the door to Cárdenas.

Path to civil war

The tragedy is that all of these options will lead to civil war, which would begin with the dismantling of the PRI, the party which has ruled Mexico since 1929 and which is currently racked by confusion and polarization of forces

around the government's concessions to the Zapatistas. Further, the country's agricultural and industrial producers see themselves in the mirror of Chiapas, where the insurgents wreaked havoc, expropriated land, imposed "war taxes," and kidnapped, harassed, and murdered those opposing them in the style of Peru's Shining Path terrorists, according to inhabitants of those areas declared "free zones" by negotiator Camacho Solís.

Several columnists have already stated it outright: If the narco-terrorists get their way, there will be two Mexicos—an Indian one with its own laws, language, and army, because the EZLN has never disarmed; and another *mestizo*, which is the vast majority of Mexicans. In the case of Chiapas, a state bordering on Guatemala, there is the additional danger of the EZLN's separatist zeal being encouraged by the autonomy concession.

Of all the options, the one which has grabbed most attention is that of an independent Camacho candidacy. It is no accident that his Wall Street and London friends have already launched an unprecedented campaign on his behalf. Various articles have appeared in the *Washington Post*, the London *Financial Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times*, openly backing him as Mexico's next President.

The Feb. 27 *Washington Post*, for example, stated, "The Chiapas peace talks have made Mr. Camacho the symbol of a more open system, with greater choice for the public and less official corruption. . . . If he should run against Mr. Colosio, there would be nothing automatic about the outcome," that is, a PRI victory would not be assured.

While presenting the idea that the Chiapas conflict could prove a turning point in the political history of Mexico, the U.S. daily defined relations between the Salinas government and its negotiator as "ambiguous." "Mr. Camacho has gone farther than the government expected in his criticism of the present political system," editorialized the *Post*, "but it hasn't repudiated him." The daily acknowledged that Camacho is allied to Cárdenas's PRD, which has become the virtual electoral arm of the Zapatistas and fully backs its demands. "For the fragmented and disorganized Mexican left, the negotiations have served as a sort of catalyst," the *Post* asserted.

'Free elections' a separatist smokescreen

Another *Washington Post* article on Feb. 24 makes clear that the Zapatista demands for free elections and opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are pure demagoguery. The *Post* was also delighted that in the peace talks, negotiator Camacho did an "about face" and agreed to open the talks to a national agenda, when just days earlier he had said such a thing was impossible. "There are many of us who want change . . . and new treatment for Indian communities throughout the country. The solution will be a commitment to democracy," said Camacho Solís.

But what is this "new treatment" of the Indians which "Commander Marcos" is demanding? Above all, it is the de-

mand for "administrative and political autonomy" for the Indian communities. This concession would mean the destruction of the current federal pact established by the Constitution, and would set the basis for Mexico's territorial disintegration.

On Feb. 24, the London *Financial Times* celebrated this "change in strategy," assuring readers that Camacho was privately pressuring for "the necessary political concessions if the crisis in Chiapas is to be resolved."

That British intelligence and the Anglo-American financial elites are behind all of this is proven by the fact that one of the leading human rights groups active in Chiapas, Americas Watch, is heavily financed by speculator George Soros, whose links with Camacho Solís were revealed when the latter, as mayor of Mexico City, granted Soros a concession to construct the huge speculative real estate emporium known as "the Santa Fe project."

Speculators seek a divided Mexico

Clearly, a divided Mexico at war with itself will more easily fall prey to international speculators such as Soros, and to its international banking creditors. That they in fact might want to provoke such a civil war, using the elections as pretext, is revealed by Anglo-American agent of influence Alan Riding who, in a *New York Times* article on Feb. 27, said, "If Mr. Colosio wins, will anyone believe him? . . . For unrest to be avoided, Mr. Cárdenas would have to concede defeat. . . . In the past, Mexico's political system escaped outside scrutiny. But after NAFTA, Congress, human rights groups and the press in the United States are all eager to test Mexico's claim to be a democracy. So this year, even Washington must sign off on the fairness of the elections."

On March 9, the *Wall Street Journal* entitled its coverage, "Tensions Run High in Mexico's Politics as Camacho Considers a Run for Office." The daily reported the situation inside the PRI: "If Camacho accepts the candidacy for another party, we'll finish him. He'll be a traitor."

Clearly, if a successful military offensive against the Zapatistas is going to be launched, President Salinas will have to break with his friends of the São Paulo Forum (a Cuban-spawned collection of narco-terrorist organizations and sympathizers from across the continent) whom he has helped in negotiations with their respective governments, including his official biographer, the Sandinistas' Tomás Borge.

He will also have to break with the Anglo-American establishment, the authors of NAFTA, who are now betraying him as well. For the bankers, Salinas, Colosio, and the PRI are unsalvageable. The British press agency Reuters reflected this view in a Feb. 24 report on the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, which was attended by a desperate President Salinas during the Zapatista destabilization. Said one diplomat quoted at the affair: "A banker told me that Salinas was treated like dirt at Davos. No one wanted to see him." Why then insist on keeping the chimera of "investor confidence" alive?