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CENTRAL AMERICA

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## López Portillo states policy for Salvador

by Gretchen Small

Mexican President José López Portillo launched a renewed push last week toward an effective political solution to end the fighting in El Salvador. Although his efforts were entirely blacked out of the America media, López Portillo has laid out a workable set of parameters for any solution to the crisis that slaps both the Socialist International effort to dominate "negotiations," and the military confrontation plans of U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig.

In a meeting with Panamanian President Aristedes Royo, and in an as yet unaired CBS interview addressed directly to the American population, López Portillo outlined the following critical elements to a solution: first, El Salvador must not be defined as an area of superpower confrontation. Central America and the Caribbean are de facto "being converted into a border" between the Soviet Union and the United States, he warned.

Second, the weapons flow to either side must stop immediately, including those from the U.S. "If one side provides arms, the other will also," the Mexican president bluntly stated.

Under these conditions, talks can be convened between the leading Salvadorean figures and parties—and only the Salvadoreans—toward the immediate formation of a Constituent Congress that can freely decide on the future of the country. Mexico's role, as López Portillo defined it, is not to mediate directly, but to ensure a regional environment in which such talks could be productive.

Various "political solutions" have been proposed for El Salvador since the beginning of the year, but most of them, at closer examination, have been shown to be designed to further the goal of "permanent instability" that for years has dominated policy, including that of the United States, toward El Salvador.

Prominent attention was given to the Socialist International's call at the beginning of March for its chairman Willy Brandt to sit down with President Reagan and work out a "deal." That proposal passed into unlamented oblivion, however, when the Mexican government ignored its existence, and the West German government

issued a statement denying the proposal had even been made!

The London *Financial Times* more recently noted that another international mediation team was about to be "appointed," this one to include "one senior U.S. senator, one Latin American political figure, one representative of the West German Social Democratic Party, and one Italian Christian Democrat." While no further word has surfaced on this last initiative, it is presumed to fit into the outlines of Sen. Ted Kennedy's repeated call for the so-called Zimbabwe solution for El Salvador, modeled on the short-lived British-run settlement of the Rhodesian crisis.

Mexico's political prestige and weight in the region gives added effectiveness to its proposals, as demonstrated in the response of Panamanian President Royo. López Portillo extracted a commitment from the Panamanians, who until now lined up with the Socialist International and are widely believed to be one source of arms and financing for the guerrillas, to cut that support. On March 25, following his official talks with the Mexican president, Royo announced that Panama is *not* supporting the guerrillas, in contrast to its policy toward Nicaragua's Sandinistas two years ago. The two presidents then signed a joint communiqué promising cooperation in seeking a solution.

Top on the Mexican president's mind is how to bring President Ronald Reagan into alignment with this crisis-solving perspective, and out of the quagmire Haig has created. The late-April summit between the two presidents is the "deadline" by which general policy agreement between them should be reached.

In an embargoed interview given to CBS two weeks ago and run only in Mexico, López Portillo warned that "no solutions of force" would work in El Salvador, and talk of "intervention" now poses the greatest danger to the area. American cartoons and funny filmstrips used to be made about the coups, uprisings, and rebellions in Latin America, López Portillo noted; now these events have been turned into a question of superpower intervention and "ideology."

When the interviewer tried to present López Portillo as an "idealist" for thinking time was left for a political solution, López Portillo answered: "It is not a question of time, but of will. . . . What we can and must do is use our forums of communication to pose problems. While they are not posed, they will not be solved."

López Portillo ended with a direct appeal to the U.S. population that they understand Mexico's position and implicitly join it: "We are not arrogantly opposing the acts of the authorities of your country. We do not believe in the principle of force but in the force of principles, and in this we have been tenacious and constant. We are not hostile . . . but we think our principles must be defended."