Dateline Mexico by Carlos Valdez

Salinas backs U.S. against Panama

The government declaration draws heavy fire, as a violation of Mexico's traditional respect for national sovereignty.

The Salinas government's May 14 condemnation of Panamanian Defense Forces chief Gen. Manuel Noriega as "unethical and immoral," and its defense of the recent Organization of American States resolution against Panama, has prompted universal questioning here of a presidential decision without precedent in the history of the country.

The government's declaration was widely identified as a betrayal by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of the nation's *Juarista* policy of non-intervention in the affairs of other countries, and as a deliberate concession to Mexico's creditors and the U.S. State Department.

This viewpoint was elaborated by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, leader of the new Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), who charged during a May 19 electoral tour through the state of Michoacán, "The $1.96 billion loan recently given to Mexico, is payment for the obedience and servility the government is showing towards U.S. intervention in Panama." He stressed that throughout the history of interventionism in Ibero-America, "the Mexican government has never—as now—placed itself at the service, including in international forums, of domination by the United States."

Cárdenas's PRD party issued a formal statement May 18 which charged, among other things, that "The [U.S.] destabilization strategy has been going on for at least a year, and ranges from economic sanctions to constant slander and the sending of troops. Every one of the measures and the strategy as a whole violates international law and is contrary to cooperation and peaceful coexistence among states." The statement goes on to charge that Mexico, with its "obsessive servility," has made itself "an involuntary accomplice in the aggression against Panama. . . . No government is permitted to set itself up as judge and guarantor of democracy in others. In the case of Mexico, such a pretense is especially grotesque if one considers what kind of moral and political authority can a government have whose origin is anti-democratic as a product of . . . the electoral fraud committed here last year."

On May 15, the lead editorial of the daily *La Jornada* described the Mexican government's statement against Panama as "outrageous" and said that it "expresses terms foreign to [Mexico's] diplomatic tradition." On May 16, *El Economista* journalist Francisco Rodríguez stated that the Mexico Declaration on Panama noticeably coincides with recommendations made to the Bush administration by the Heritage Foundation, with the objective of "getting certain—shall we say—bonuses in the renegotiation" of Mexico's foreign debt.

Rodríguez warns that "this time, the Salinas administration went beyond what tradition and even the law formally allows" to a President of the Republic. The columnist then asks, "Who among the electorate has ordered the so-called authorities . . . to break with the sound Juarista tradition [which states that] among people, as among nations, respect for others' rights is peace?" After insisting on the unconstitutional nature of the Declaration against Panama, Rodríguez concludes, "in my memory, *no other administration* claiming our revolutionary heritage has gone so far."

On May 16, the lead editorial of the daily *El Día*, a newspaper associated with the "progressive" currents of the PRI party, states that the foreign ministry's communiqué on Panama contains "a paragraph which we feel could be an error, or a *concession to the State Department*, and that is the concern—stated in redundant terms—for the 'ethical and moral' quality of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, commander of the Panamanian Defense Forces." The editorial warns, "*If it is a concession . . . one must remember that countries which are in the habit of making concessions to please North American strategists have never won any greater or fewer favors than those who resisted making concessions.*"

On March 17, the Popular Socialist Party published a statement in the daily *Excélsior*, which charged that the Declaration of Mexico represents a "policy of alignment with the U.S. State Department," as well as a violation of the Mexican Constitution. It says that General Noriega is "undoubtedly part of those nationalist forces of Panama" who are fighting "the battle of this century to recover sovereignty over the Canal Zone."

Even in the official daily *El Nacional* of May 21, journalist Raúl Trejo Delarbre wrote a front-page column recognizing that the contents of the Mexico declaration violate the "Juárez doctrine" guiding Mexican foreign policy. Trejo Delarbre asks, "After decertifying Noriega, with what authority are we going to demand that other governments abstain from issuing equally meddlesome moral certifications from abroad?"