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Ibero-American leaders ask Reagan to support Contadora peace initiative

by Valerie Rush

Three of the four Contadora Group heads of state joined efforts in early December to send a unified and resolute message to President Ronald Reagan to end the Kissingerite influence which has dominated U.S. foreign policy toward its southern neighbors through the present time.

Venezuelan President Lusinchi delivered the message personally during a White House meeting with Reagan Dec. 4, while Mexican and Colombian Presidents de la Madrid and Betancur issued a public appeal—as "messengers of peace"—to their U.S. colleague during talks the two Contadora founders held in Mexico City that same week. The Contadora Group, consisting of Panama, Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia, was formed to propose a regionally-based solution to the conflict in Central America.

The message is perhaps best summed up in the words of Betancur, who said: "If the industrialized countries can be persuaded to give Central America a hand, the people of that region would achieve the development required to overcome the dilemma in which they presently find themselves. But this help should not be in the form of charity. We do not need paternalism."

While demanding economic development as the only pathway to peace in Central America and stability throughout the hemisphere, the Ibero-American Presidents were also quick to warn of "incalculable risks" and "unforeseen consequences" should the Reagan administration opt for a "military solution" to the crisis in Central America.

Speaking before the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington Dec. 5, Lusinchi urged a negotiated political solution before "the situation in that region becomes uncontrollable and produces violence of serious and incalculable implications."

In their joint communiqué, Presidents Betancur and de la Madrid demanded "an end to all demonstrations of force, acts of destabilization, and everything that hampers peace in Central America." Betancur elaborated on the root causes of instability in the region by warning that "the grave economic problems of the underdeveloped nations, deriving from their dependency and condition of potentially useful spectators in the East-West confrontation, face an even more terrible prospect: the loss of authority to freely decide their own destinies. The international entities tend to view them as third-class passengers on the train of history."

On Nov. 28, President Betancur openly challenged the Kissinger Commission's recommendations for Central America during an address before the "International Symposium on Central America and Capitalization of the Central American Development Bank," convened in the city of Cartagena, Colombia. Emphasizing his disagreement with the

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Kissinger Commission proposal for the long-term "Hong Kong-ization" of the region as inappropriate to the "immediate intensive care needs of a critical patient," Betancur added:

"To the degree in which the region can be supported, we shall contribute to world peace, keeping in mind of course that these countries have a history of their own and cannot be understood by analogy, as if they were mere experimental arenas like Vietnam or Angola. . . . Obviously, the military option cannot be viewed in terms of an economic cost-benefit analysis. We all know that this kind of solution would violate the principles of international and inter-American law."

Kissinger Commissioner Robert Leiken of Georgetown University, and Kissinger intimate Harry Schlaudeman, special U.S. envoy to Central America, were both present at the

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Cartagena summit and could not miss the message.

More important, however, is whether President Reagan received the message. While U.S. Defense Secretary Weinberger's recent statements warning against Vietnam-style adventurism in Central America provide a welcome opening for a new understanding between the United States and its natural—if frustrated—allies to the south, it remains to be seen whether similar enlightenment in handling the economic crisis wreaking havoc across the continent will shine forth from Washington.

Thus far, the same pro-IMF, free-market insanity continues to dominate U.S. economic policy toward Ibero-America, as exemplified by Secretary of State Shultz's Dec. 6 speech to the Caribbean Basin Conference in Miami. He called for a rejection of state ownership in Central America and the Caribbean and the adoption of drug-centered, "open market economies" like that of Singapore.

Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Dam, speaking Dec. 6 before the Dallas Council on World Affairs, also demanded that Ibero-America impose IMF austerity "adjustments" and "open its markets" as the only way to avoid "internal violence and a return to military dictatorships. . . ."

In an unmistakeable threat, Dam warned that Ibero-America's failure to follow IMF recommendations would open up "a whole range of alternatives . . . and not just Marxist-Leninist regimes. We have already seen in the Garcia Meza regime that ruled Bolivia from 1980 to 1981 a government dominated by narcotics traffickers. And beyond that, consider the dangerous chaos that could ensue if nihilistic radicals like Peru's Sendero Luminoso [Shining Path] guerrillas multiply their strength."

Outrageously, Dam held up the Dominican Republic as the model of a country which has demonstrated a laudable commitment to the IMF's program. He failed to mention that this "adherence" led to bloody riots against the Fund's brutal austerity dictates last April, leaving 51 people dead.

Clearly, a presidential purge of such Kissinger elements in the State Department is required to right both the strategic military and economic policy doctrines of the Reagan administration.

'The IMF, ally of subversion'

Ibero-America's Contadora leaders, as well as others, have been explicit on the kind of policy changes the Reagan administration must undertake if it is to recapture the confidence and friendship of Ibero-America generally.

Former Venezuelan President Herrera Campins used unusually strong language at a press conference given in Costa Rica Dec. 5 in which he accused the International Monetary Fund of being "the best ally of subversion in Latin America." He explained that the IMF is applying across-the-board austerity prescriptions without regard to the reality of the countries with which it deals. "As a result, the political stability of the Latin American nations is threatened. To this can be added the position taken by the United States that each country arrange its foreign-debt problem bilaterally, opposing any joint formulas. The U.S. knows that we are weak countries, but that collectively we are strong. It wants to take advantage of us."

In his address to the Organization of American States Dec. 5, Venezuelan President Lusinchi reiterated Campin's point, if a bit more diplomatically:

"We will meet our obligations, but always with a focus on Latin American solidarity. . . . We cannot enter into readjustment and austerity beyond what is prudent: We cannot endanger the harmony or equilibrium of our societies, imposing upon our people conditions of life incompatible with reasonable levels of well-being. To go further would be unlawful and would in effect be handing ourselves over to chance, to the dominion of the unpredictable, and yielding up our capability and obligation to manage the crisis prudently."

President Betancur, in a Bogotá address to visiting European Community President Gaston Thorn on Oct. 31, elaborated on his development recommendations for Central America:

"We must channel external resources [into the area] to reinforce plans for construction and rehabilitation of the physical and social infrastructure of these countries with hospitals, aqueducts, schools, roadways, sewer systems. . . . Such a program of rehabilitation and reconstruction for Central America is urgent in the short term. In this regard I disagreed with the [long-term] focus of Professor Kissinger during conversations we held a year ago in New York. . . ."

And in discussions with de la Madrid during his Mexico visit, Betancur warned:

"We don't believe that orthodox and technocratic formulas will resolve the problem, but on the contrary could aggravate it, endangering democratic institutions and promoting class war whose outcome would not be difficult to predict."

In those same talks, Mexico's President urged direct dialogue between debtor and creditor governments on resolving the debt crisis, and insisted that "servicing the debt should not exceed a reasonable percentage of export income. . . . The problem of the developing sector debt demands the commitment and active participation of the debtor and creditor governments, the multilateral financial institutions and of the international banking community."

In a press conference given Dec. 7 by Betancur on the final day of his Mexico visit, the Colombian head of state called for a U.S.-Latin American conference on the foreign debt crisis, to be held in the first quarter of 1985.

Should the Reagan administration agree to such a government-level dialogue—outside the framework of such enemy institutions as the International Monetary Fund—President Reagan will have taken a long-overdue step toward creating the "community of principle among sovereign republics" that John Quincy Adams and other of our distinguished forefathers dreamed of.