
Mexico

Zedillo takes the gloves off against Zapatistas

by Hugo López Ochoa and Cynthia Rush

In a nationwide television address on the evening of Feb. 9, Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo announced that he had instructed his Attorney General to issue arrest warrants for the top six leaders of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), the narco-terrorist insurgency which has operated in the southeastern state of Chiapas since Jan. 1, 1994. Among those sought for arrest are Rafaél Sebastián Guillén Vicente—the EZLN's "subcommander Marcos" who has become an international media star in his role as the insurgents' spokesman.

Underscoring that the government's action was coherent with "its constitutional duty to protect the safety of all Mexicans and preserve social peace," the President documented that the EZLN had taken advantage of proposed peace talks to prepare for war and reported that the Attorney General's office had discovered Zapatista weapons caches in Mexico City on Feb. 8 which included high-powered weapons, hand grenades, mortars, and explosives.

The EZLN is a *criminal* enterprise, Zedillo said, a fact which was also borne out in a Channel 13 television report Feb. 10 showing Zapatista leaders torturing a municipal president in Chiapas. There have been numerous cases, documented by authorities, of the EZLN's barbaric torture of Chiapan leaders who oppose it. As the Mexican President emphasized, the evidence discovered proves that the EZLN "is neither popular, nor indigenous, nor Chiapan. . . . It was preparing new and greater acts of violence, not only in Chiapas, but elsewhere in the country." The Zapatistas, he reported, actually grew out of an armed guerrilla group, the National Liberation Forces, created in 1969 for the purpose of taking power via armed struggle. The Attorney General's office has already arrested two groups of Zapatistas in Mexico City and another in Veracruz, the President added.

Zedillo's bold action, which includes changes among the nation's top military leadership and probable troop deployment to take back EZLN territory in Chiapas, has predictably provoked hysteria among those British-backed groups which have egged on the actions of the ELZN and its support apparatus, including the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, to dismember Mexico physically and hand over its remains to international usurers. The British wire service Reuters shrieked Feb. 10 that Zedillo has

"pushed the troubled state of Chiapas back to the brink of war. . . . Throwing caution to the wind. . . . Zedillo's move appeared to end hopes of a peaceful end to the Maya Indian rebellion."

A spokesman for "Comandante" Samuel Ruiz, the bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas who acted on behalf of the Zapatistas in his role as "mediator," lamented, "This is very, very serious. This is pointing to a solution of war, and it breaks the process of dialogue that was under way."

The issue is sovereignty

During a Feb. 5 gathering in Querétaro to commemorate the promulgation of Mexico's 1917 Constitution, President Zedillo had warned that he intended to take action against the EZLN, as the situation in Chiapas became more untenable. He surprised his listeners when he said that while he intended to pursue dialogue and negotiation with the insurgents, if that strategy yielded no results, "I shall proceed to convene an extraordinary session of the Congress to . . . determine the most appropriate alternatives to guarantee a definitive solution to the conflict." In his Feb. 9 speech, the President announced that he will convene a special session of Congress to determine the next steps to take. He also offered an amnesty to any EZLN members who were prepared to surrender and cooperate.

Undoubtedly a factor in Zedillo's decision was the rebellion led by powerful factions of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in recent weeks against the government's failure to act aggressively against the Zapatistas and their backers. The center of that rebellion was in the state of Tabasco, where tens of thousands of PRI members spontaneously protested plans to force the resignation of the PRI governors of Tabasco and Chiapas, Roberto Madrazo Pinedo and Eduardo Robledo Rincón respectively, and hand their posts over to the PRD as part of a pact to "strengthen democracy." If either of these oil-producing and neighboring states in Mexico's southeast were to fall into the hands of the PRD, the EZLN's electoral arm, this would have effectively split Mexico at the Tehuantepec Isthmus, one of the British oligarchy's long-held strategic goals.

The situation in Chiapas is so tense that Zedillo's Feb. 5 warning to the EZLN immediately provoked an avalanche of statements from PRI congressman, church spokesmen, and others urging the Congress to immediately approve military action against the EZLN. One advocate of action is Jorge Constantino Kanter, a leader of the Belisario Domínguez organization of rural property owners in Comitán, Chiapas. In early February, he warned that if the government failed to act, cattlemen and producers would defend themselves—something which has already started to occur. Kanter issued this warning prior to Feb. 5. On Feb. 6, Zapatista assassins kidnapped his cousin, Gustavo Mahr Kanter, and tortured and murdered him. His body was found in a shallow grave with one leg mutilated.