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CENTRAL AMERICA

The United States and Mexico share a concern over reducing the level of violence in Central America, but differ over how this might be accomplished. The Mexicans have often favored left-wing or revolutionary groups and consider themselves, with considerable justification, to have played a key role in the success of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. The Mexicans argue that stepped-up pressure on the Sandinistas will drive them toward further totalitarian excesses. The Mexicans also have called for power-sharing negotiations to resolve the conflict in El Salvador.

Mexico's preferred approach has been to encourage direct negotiations between the rebels in El Salvador and the government, and between Nicaragua and Honduras. Such an approach has been a key element in their participation in the Contadora process. Mexico's preference for direct negotiations has often favored Nicaragua. Foreign Secretary Sepulveda has been particularly concerned that the current level of violence between Nicaragua and Honduras will lead to war unless the conflict is quickly resolved. He has been very critical of U.S. naval deployment off the Nicaraguan coast. We, of course, prefer a comprehensive approach to regional violence, one which would involve democratization and which would encompass the basic principles enunciated in the San Jose Declaration. The Mexicans deny that there is significant Nicaraguan support of the Salvadoran rebels.

During Secretary Shultz' visit to Mexico City on April 18-19, each side outlined its respective policy toward Central America. Although there was no meeting of the minds, the Mexicans made it clear that they remained concerned with the impact of regional violence on their national interests and that they were amenable to accommodation of U.S. and Mexican policies toward the region. More recently, in the Cancun Declaration issued by the Contadora Four in mid-July, Mexico joined in the strongest statement yet by the Four in support of democratic institutions. The Cancun Declaration also enumerated a number of principles of international relations which bear strong resemblance to the San Jose principles. It was, therefore, more supportive of a multilateral approach to resolving regional conflict than were previous Contadora statements. Nevertheless, the Mexicans continue to be supportive of the Nicaraguan outlook within the Contadora forum.

It is too soon to tell whether President de la Madrid's signing of the Cancun Declaration represents an evolution in Mexican policy toward Central America. It is also too soon to tell whether the Contadora effort will succeed in reducing

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regional conflict, although prospects are limited given the magnitude of the problem. In any case, Mexico's policy toward the area is likely to continue to be driven by the feeling that social and economic problems, rather than outside interference, lie at the root of the region's instability and that these problems can best be addressed by revolutionary regimes. The Mexicans also believe that their own revolutionary credentials, as well as their timely support for the Sandinistas, enhance their rapport with revolutionary groups or regimes and give them the possibility of guiding revolutionary change in a way that does not threaten Mexican interests.

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