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Salvadoran President: Rebels Attempt To Assist Arena By Disrupting Elections To Undermine Center

by Deborah Tyroler

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In an interview with the New York Times on March 15, President Jose Napoleon Duarte stated that the failure of his successor to build on his "centrist policies" would lead to a "confrontation between the government and the people and a growth in the help" to the rebels. "Finally, it could be so strong that it could create conditions for a popular insurrection." Duarte said the expected victory of the rightist candidate, Alfredo Cristiani of the National Republican Alliance (ARENA), would probably strengthen the extremes and lead to the disintegration of all centrist political parties. Next, the president asserted that the rebels were attempting to help ARENA by disrupting the elections to undermine the center. Duarte denounced recent peace initiatives by the guerrillas. He said they were an attempt to create a precedent-setting violation of the Constitution, impose a provisional government and "weaken and destroy" the armed forces. "When they didn't achieve any of their three objectives, they denied the validity of the elections," he said. Nonetheless, said Duarte, the initiatives were a step forward because they started a dialogue. The guerrillas, who have boycotted the last five national elections, recognized the legitimacy of the democratic process for the first time, he said. "If it's valid to vote in different military conditions, as they propose, it's also valid in whatever moment that this man can freely put his ballot in the ballot box." Duarte denied reports that the US had pressured him into make a counter-offer of a much shorter postponement in the elections. He said the State Department offered advice and asked to be kept informed of developments "as is normal in such circumstances." (Basic data from New York Times, 03/16/89)

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