

MEXICO

Leftists pledge to wage peaceful resistance It's unclear whether defeated presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador's 'parallel government' will be a traditional political opposition group or something more.

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MEXICO CITY - Now that Mexican leftists have acclaimed defeated candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador president of a parallel government, the question is will they settle into the role of a normal democratic opposition or try to press their agenda through more militant resistance.

López Obrador, who lost the July 2 presidential election by 234,000 votes to conservative Felipe Calderón, led a massive protest for seven weeks with followers camped out in the center of Mexico City clogging the heart of the capital to demand a full vote recount.

The protest culminated in a self-styled convention of delegates who packed central Zocalo plaza Saturday night and voted by a show of hands to form a parallel government with a Cabinet and plans to swear in López Obrador as president on Nov. 20.

López Obrador, who championed the rights of the poor during his campaign, said Saturday the parallel government will work on proposals to rewrite Mexico's constitution to guarantee the right to food, work, healthcare, education and housing while overhauling "corrupt" public institutions.

Saturday's mass convention held back from vowing to pay taxes to the parallel government or break existing laws. But it pledged to wage a campaign of peaceful resistance to undermine Calderón at every turn during the single six-year term allowed by Mexico's constitution.

At least one López Obrador aide, former Congressman José Agustín Ortiz Pinchetti, said, however, no one was "calling for an insurrection" to topple the government.

But it was still unclear how López Obrador planned to implement his "parallel government" policies or what effect it would have. He has said his alternative government will be "itinerant" -- traveling around the country to touch base with supporters outside of Mexico City but based somewhere in the capital.

Mexico expert George Grayson of the College of William & Mary in Virginia said he expects President-elect Calderón to promote his own platform of social programs to tackle poverty and inequality.

Grayson said the movement could be a positive influence if it "keeps the elite's feet to the fire" while funneling its ideas to the congressmen and senators of López Obrador's leftist Democratic Revolution Party, now the second-strongest force in Congress.

"The problem is if they become frustrated and resort to militant resistance," Grayson said. That could again result in widespread street protests, the blockade of government offices -- or even

worse -- disruptive attacks on the capital's infrastructure, such as its water system or electric grid.

"I just hope he maintains restraint," Grayson added.

Recent political polls have shown declining support for López Obrador and some analysts say that raises questions about what his movement can achieve. Some analysts say the chances are slim that López Obrador can launch a radical opposition government.

The former Mexico City mayor claims a broad conspiracy of business leaders cheated him out of an election victory. Calderón will be sworn in on Dec. 1 as President Vicente Fox's successor.

Dozens of world leaders, including President Bush and Argentine President Nestor Kirchner -- have recognized the victory and promised to work with Calderón as Mexico's new chief executive.

But López Obrador has refused to back down from his claim that he is the country's rightful leader.