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Apr 06, 2017 by [Benjamin Leffel](#)

Rebirth of the Municipal Foreign Policy Movement ^[1]

The largely untold story of Southern California's unique place in American diplomatic history is now being told, and holds invaluable lessons for today. In the last decade of the Cold War, the former Center for Innovative Diplomacy in Irvine, California was a key catalyst in what came to be known as the "municipal foreign policy movement." The Center chronicled its own mobilizing efforts, as well as the stories of countless other American cities in its publication, the *Bulletin of Municipal Foreign Policy*, which for the first time are available online for viewing, at escholarship.org/uc/uci_cid. It was my honor to present part of this history at the [City Diplomacy Conference](#) put on by the Association of Public Diplomacy Scholars in early March.

[Note from the CPD Blog Manager: images embedded throughout this blog are from the CID archive.]

DENVER COUNCIL LENDS SUPPORT TO CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES

Last December, Salvadoran and Nicaraguan refugees received a boost from the Denver city council, which passed a resolution calling for Congressional passage of legislation granting the refugees a temporary haven in the U.S.

The measure was sponsored by Councilmember Ramona Martinez, and although some opposition was expected, it was passed unanimously by the council. "We anticipated the possibility of debate and confrontation," said an aide to Martinez. "But we also did our best to educate the Council before the vote was taken."

The resolution endorses the DeConcini-Moakley bill, which has been reintroduced in Congress this year. The same legislation passed the House in 1988, but never was voted on by the Senate. The DeConcini-Moakley bill specifically provides for "a General Accounting Office investigation and report on conditions of displaced Nicaraguans and Salvadorans," and "the temporary stay of detention and deportation of certain Nicaraguans and Salvadorans."

More than a year ago, the Denver city council considered whether to make Denver a city of refuge for Nicaraguans and Salvadorans displaced by the wars in their countries. The ordinance would have called upon city employees — including police — to refrain from helping federal immigration officials to deport Salvadorans. That measure, however, never came



National Guardsman checking movement of civilians in El Salvador, where 30% of the population has been displaced by the war.

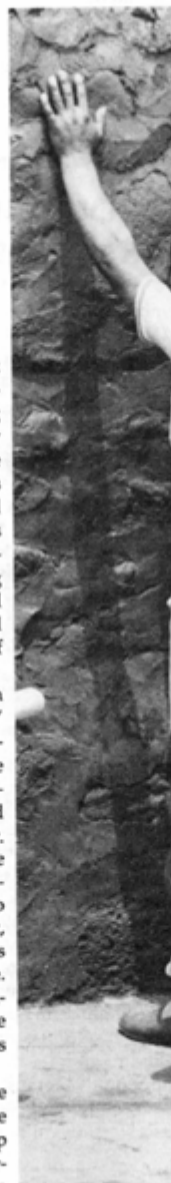
BERKELEY MAYOR BATTLES FOR RELEASE OF SALVADORAN MAYOR

MADEO LOPEZ, MAYOR OF THE Salvadoran town of San Antonio Los Ranchos, was traveling in a United Nations vehicle last January on a road from San Salvador to his home town. Along the way the vehicle was stopped at a military checkpoint, and within minutes, Lopez and three others with him — including Manuel Cartagena, the president of the coordinating committee of El Salvador's repopulated communities — had been captured and detained by soldiers of the 4th Brigade of the Salvadoran armed forces.

Mayor Lopez spent almost a week in jail on charges that he was a "guerrilla" leader. And the Army was hardly a cordial host. The four captives spent the entire time stripped of their clothes (except for underwear), blindfolded and tortured, with their thumbs tied together.

In fact, Mayor Lopez's only crime was that he had led 900 Salvadoran refugees from a Honduran refugee camp to San Antonio Los Ranchos last August, after most had spent about five years awaiting an opportunity to return home. Mayor Lopez negotiated with the military to ensure the safe passage of these refugees, and since then the Army has resented his presence.

Mayor Lopez's detention might have lasted longer — or had a worse outcome — were it not for a sister city relationship established between Berkeley, California and San Antonio Los Ranchos in



Among the stories of the municipal foreign policy movement:

Alongside thousands of cities around the world, hundreds of American cities declared themselves Nuclear-Free Zones to keep nuclear weapons production-related materials out of their jurisdictions. The federal government balked at these cities, saying they had no business being involved in matters of national security.

Ronald Reagan's support for anti-communist forces in Central America led to civil wars, sending refugees fleeing to the U.S., many of whom were welcomed by American sanctuary cities. Wisconsin itself became a sanctuary state. Hundreds of American cities also forged sister city relationships with Central American cities to bring financial aid and other resources to the war torn locales. The federal government cried foul on cities interfering in what it felt was none of their business.

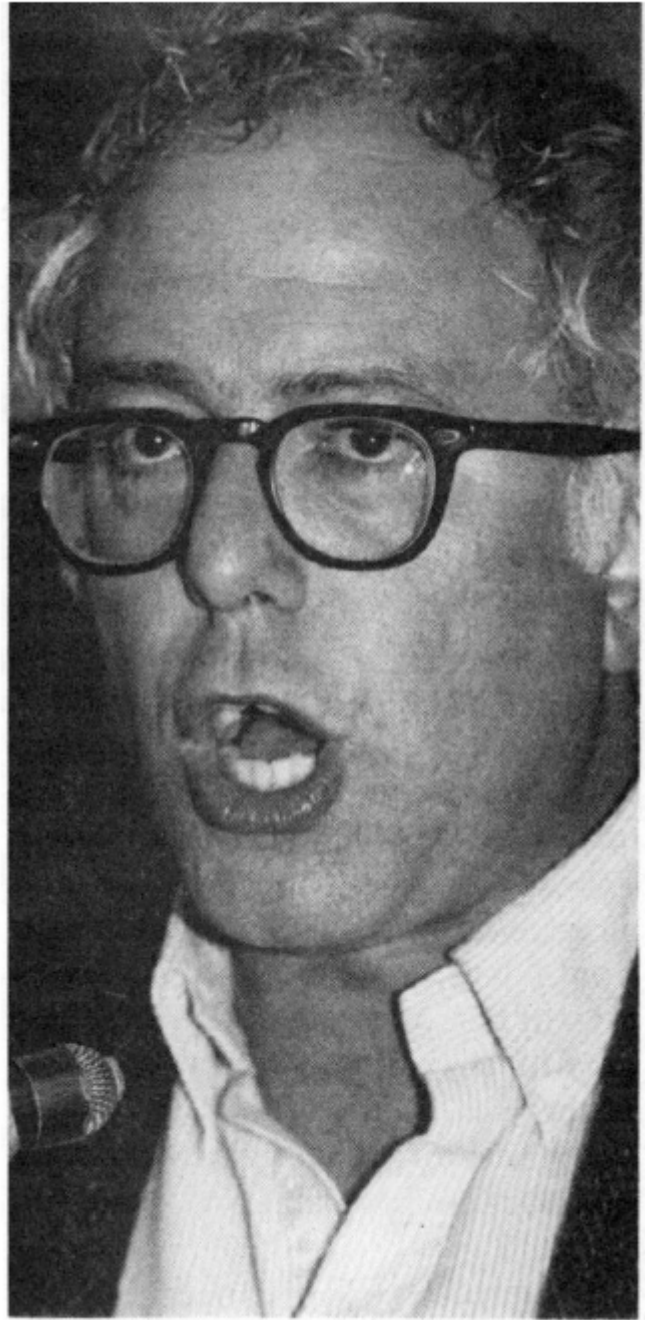
When Reagan and Congress' efforts to fight Apartheid were grossly insufficient, U.S. cities divested billions from South Africa in order to bring about the end of Apartheid through American corporate withdrawal. Archbishop Desmond Tutu applauded these efforts, and a freed Nelson Mandela joined U.S. mayors to continue the fight. Some in the U.S. federal government threatened to take away these cities' transportation funding in response to their intervention in foreign affairs.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly for today, the Center for Innovative Diplomacy mobilized hundreds of cities on reducing the chlorofluorocarbon emissions which were eating away at the ozone, advancing the goals of the Montreal Protocol at the local level, establishing the North American Congress of Local Governments for a Stratospheric Protection Accord (SPA), and founding the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), the largest environmental city network in the world today.

MAYOR SANDERS USES DIPLOMACY EXPERIENCE IN CAMPAIGN

It used to be rare for a local official running for higher office to claim foreign affairs experience. But Burlington, Vermont, Mayor Bernie Sanders has been one of many officials to prove the common wisdom wrong.

Sanders told *Nation's Cities Weekly* that his campaign for the House of Representatives is "similar to" Jesse Jackson's campaign for president earlier this year. But Jackson's foreign policy experience is only slightly more extensive than Sanders'. In fact, Sanders probably has more experience than many federal officials. He was the highest U.S. official to attend Nicaragua's first post-revolution birthday party; he helped establish a sister city in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua; and he just signed an agreement establishing a sister city tie with Yaroslavl, a city 150 miles north of Moscow.



Mayor Bernie Sanders

Some in the federal government called them "renegade local governments," yet their leadership proved as functional and critical as nation-states. Today, the lessons of these "renegade" local governments are a much needed guiding light. Intransparency and dishonesty from the current White House led *The Washington Post* to recently adopt the motto "Democracy dies in darkness," reminding readers of the dangers of secrecy in government.

USC Center on Public Diplomacy writer Mark Dillen contemplated another dark aspect of the Trump administration: the proposed reduction of State Department resources and deemphasizing of foreign aid while endorsing protectionism and nationalism. Less international communication necessarily means more foreign counterparts being left in the

dark about what the U.S. actually represents, and what most Americans actually believe. Dillen asks, does American public diplomacy, then, die in this darkness? I answer: Not if we learn from the city diplomacy leaders of the past and foster the growth of new ones.

City Leaders Unite to S

Representatives from municipalities around the world have formed a coalition to address common environmental concerns.



AT THE U.N.

Representatives of 200 cities created the International Council for Local Environment Initiatives, designed to solve the world's environmental problems from the ground

Cities Marching On

Nelson Mandela was warmly greeted when he visited U.S. cities in June, and received a commitment to continue the push for freedom in South Africa.

THE VICIOUS APARTHEID REGIME shackled your body, but it could not imprison your spirit.”

When Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley greeted Nelson Mandela with those words last June, he was one of dozens of local officials who reached out to warmly

apartheid movement. “We thank you, we admire you, and most of all we love you,” he said.

Tom Bradley’s opening remarks in

PHOTO: GAIL OSKIN



WARM GREETINGS.

Michael Dukakis, Winnie Mandela, Ted Kennedy, Mandela and Mayor Ray Flynn in Boston. Below: Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley with M

City diplomacy luminary and Attorney Michael Shuman, a leader of the former Center for Innovative Diplomacy, reminds us that local government participation in foreign affairs is enumerated in and protected by the Constitution. Thus, when American local governments responded to the threat of nuclear annihilation vis-à-vis the U.S. arms race with the Soviet Union, to the federal government’s inadequate response to Apartheid, and to other problems from the federal level, the resultant municipal activism was not only legal, it was defining of American federalism.

Dr. Benjamin Barber, author of *If Mayors Ruled The World* (2013), notes that “In the age of Donald Trump, resistance will be localized.” How true. Several American mayors have vowed to not let Trump obstruct their fight against climate change. In response to Trump’s rollback of Obama-era climate policies, California is redoubling its efforts to curb emissions, and the CEO of General Electric responded to the rollback by saying that climate change is real, “should be addressed on a global basis,” and that companies should “have their own foreign policy” in that regard. Responding to Trump’s travel ban, several U.S. states have launched legal challenges to the ban. The list goes on.

In learning the lessons of the municipal foreign policy movement through the newly available archives, we can cultivate new luminaries of innovative diplomacy, advance both practice and thought leadership in international communication, and ensure that facts shine brighter and speak louder than ignorance in our public diplomacy.
