

Q: What are your special concerns on relations in the near-term future?

A: To resolve the longer-term problem, in my way of looking at it, nothing can replace intensified North-South dialogue and global negotiations at the United Nations. That is why in my proposals in Managua, although the solution was implicit, the proposals were concrete and addressed the short term. That speech was in fact a proposal for détente. . . . I am certain that Cuba is prepared to negotiate all points of security concern for the United States. If détente between the United States and Cuba is achieved, we will have alleviated most of the Central American situation. . . . It may seem absurd, but this is a security we should give to a country which feels cornered. . . . a non-aggression pact and negotiations and guarantees that its neighbors will not attack it. These are minimum assurances that a poor nation demands before it becomes desperate. If all hope is eliminated for that people, it will become desperate and a desperate people is a group of human beings ready for anything, including death. I don't believe this is the solution, eliminating Nicaragua's youth.

Cold coup in Panama adds to regional instability

by Ricardo Ramirez

The high command of Panama's National Guard, the country's only military force and highest policy-making body, was reshuffled in early March in what amounted to a coup. Forced into sudden retirement were the Guard's commander-in-chief, Florencio Flores, and two of his top deputies.

Among their replacements are officers who have been linked to the international drug traffic and to the Italian Freemasonic Propaganda-2 lodge. The outlawed P-2 lodge, headed by Licio Gelli, was identified by the Italian government as the control center for Mediterranean and Latin American drug trafficking and terrorism.

The Panamanian government insisted that the unexpected changes in the Guard's leadership were strictly "routine." But this was belied by the statements of Socialist International adventurer Hugo Spadafora, who said that "Flores was ousted because he was too timid politically." Spadafora's comments were interpreted as referring to the Guard's relatively moderate posture toward the Central American crisis, paralleling the stance taken by Mexico.

Spadafora—a former member of the cabinet—gained wide notoriety during the Nicaraguan civil war, when he organized an "International Brigade" of guerrillas to

fight alongside the rebels. Scion of the Panamanian branch of the "black nobility" Italian family of the same surname, the Libyan-trained Spadafora is now organizing similar "brigades" for El Salvador and elsewhere.

More radical stance

One possible outcome of the coup is that the Guard's new high command may now adopt a more radical stance toward Central America. In the early days of the conflict in El Salvador, former Panamanian strongman Omar Torrijos had initiated talks with all the warring factions in an attempt to mediate the conflict. He had also begun to link his peace-making efforts with those of Mexico's President, José López Portillo, and with Ecuador's Jaime Roldos.

This earned Torrijos the enmity of the Jesuits and other radicals—both of the "right" and "left" varieties—who wanted to heat up the Salvadoran war. Torrijos was killed in an "airplane accident" in July of last year, a few weeks after Ecuador's Roldos was also killed in the same manner.

The coup in Panama will likely bring about the shift in policy that was not fully achieved with Torrijos's assassination.

After Torrijos's removal, the Panamanian government continued its mediation attempts. In October 1981, President Aristides Royo offered his services as a go-between to U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig, and in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly. More recently, Panama has lent its support to López Portillo's peace proposals for Central America.

There have been persistent indications that Panama's cooperation with Mexico to bring an end to the genocidal bloodshed in Central America provoked the ire of the war-mongering circles around Haig. In mid-February, for example, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick, a "right-wing" Social Democrat, denied that either Panama or Mexico were "democratic nations," and left the distinct impression that both nations could expect reprisals.

Drugs and P-2

The new head of the National Guard is Rubén Darío Paredes, but it is believed that the real power lies with associates of the new vice-chief of staff, Col. Manuel Noriega, which include Torrijos's cousin and heir-apparent, Col. Roberto Díaz Herrera.

Noriega's name has surfaced in investigations of the drug traffic that goes through Panama, report officials of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. As head of intelligence during the almost 13 years that Torrijos ruled, Noriega oversaw the forging of the South American "connection" to Panama's traditional role as a transshipment point for drugs on their way from the Orient to the West.