

Bloodbath scheme fizzles in Panama

by Gretchen Small

The rumors broadcast around the world on Jan. 9 that Gen. Manuel Noriega, commander of Panama's Defense Forces, had sought exile in the Dominican Republic, turned out to be a black propaganda operation by the U.S. media, aimed at creating conditions of chaos, in which a bloodbath could be provoked in Panama. Such an operation had been proposed by former National Security Council staffer Norman Bailey back in December, as the only way to finally overthrow the military in Panama, principal defender of the national sovereignty.

General Noriega traveled to the Dominican Republic with his family on Jan. 9. By early evening, Moscow's two favorite U.S. television channels, Cable News Network and the National Broadcasting Corporation, began announcing a dramatic news flash: General Noriega had fled Panama, did not plan to return, and was seeking asylum.

Panama's opposition chief Gabriel Lewis Galindo (who moved to the U.S. capital in June 1987 to coordinate the overthrow of the government with the State Department) called the U.S. television report into Mayin Correa, the Panamanian correspondent of Costa Rica's *Radio Impacto*, and a top operative of the "secret government" apparatus which Lt. Col. Oliver North calls "Project Democracy." Correa in turn passed the "news" to her station headquarters, which then began broadcasting the "Noriega has fled" story into Panama.

On cue, the opposition movement organized its forces to demonstrate in Panama's financial district. They only managed to turn out 1,000 people, but it was reported on U.S. television that thousands poured into the streets of Panama in a "Carnival-like atmosphere."

The party ended, when the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF) issued a communiqué reporting that the general, indeed, planned to return. A rather wistful State Department spokesman told UPI in Washington, "He apparently did leave the country on personal business—family-type stuff. Everybody presumes he will return."

Behind the disinformation blitz was an attempt to provoke a bloodbath by the Defense Forces, Panamanian sources report. Armed provocateurs had been infiltrated into the opposition demonstrators, whose assignment was to riot, if the PDF overreacted against the demonstrators.

The scenario was premised, however, on two conditions:

that the Defense Forces command would be disoriented and jittery because of the rumors that their commander fled, and that the opposition could pull large numbers into the streets—neither of which occurred!

This report matches precisely with the scenario outlined by Norman Bailey on Dec. 8, 1987, at an opposition forum held at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Bailey there presented himself as leading the campaign to "get rid of the military institution" in Panama, and argued:

"Nothing is going to happen in Panama, and you are not going to get rid of Noriega, or the institution of the PDF, unless the people of Panama go out in the streets, and subject themselves to being beaten up, and wounded, and perhaps killed. And that is not going to do any good, unless you have got the television out there, taking a picture of the people getting beaten up, and wounded, and killed, because . . . nobody is going to know about it, no one is going to care [unless] it appears on prime-time television in the United States. Then you are going to get some action."

Things did not turn out that way on Jan. 9, however. Instead of perpetrating the killings so desired by Bailey, Panama's PDF gained a profile of U.S. plans and capabilities inside the country. Noriega's visit to the Dominican Republic "was a trick that I pulled on them [the United States], to see what quantity of honesty there is in their words," Noriega told Santo Domingo's *Listín Diario* before leaving. "This demonstrated that they continue being disloyal, conflicting, and that their word cannot be trusted." He warned: "They intend to expand the problems between us, to Latin America. It has still not been possible for the supposedly superior Anglo-Saxon race to understand us, and because they don't understand, they insult us, and thus renew . . . the dignity that they cannot erase from Latin America."

The April ultimatum

The nation of Panama has been under assault for some time, but the succession of events as 1988 opened has been extraordinary, as the Reagan administration informed the Panamanian government that it has until April 1988 to make way for a "provisional government" that accepts orders from Washington.

- On Dec. 30, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Richard Armitage flew into Panama to deliver an ultimatum to General Noriega that he must resign by April, as the first step toward setting up a new provisional government. Senior administration officials told the *Washington Post* that Armitage's mission was to tell this to Noriega "face to face," so that he "knows this is our policy."

Officials compared Armitage's mission to the October 1985 trip of Sen. Paul Laxalt to the Philippines, when Laxalt informed President Ferdinand Marcos that Ronald Reagan had decided Marcos must leave.

- On Jan. 5, the *Washington Times* published a com-

mentary by retired U.S. Adm. Elmo Zumwalt, which urged President Reagan to consider "committing U.S. forces" against Panama, should Noriega refuse to resign. Zumwalt, a member of the Moonie cult's International Security Council, argued that what happens in Panama in 1988 may prove "of more consequence" than an arms deal with the Soviets, or a summit meeting between Reagan and Gorbachov!

● That same day, the *Washington Post* carried an editorial demanding that Ibero-America back up the United States' coup plans, by throwing Panama out of the Contadora Group.

● On Jan. 6, Panama's opposition movement, the National Civil Crusade (whose headquarters are in Washington, D.C.) released a proposal for the immediate formation of a transitional government, to be led by a three-man junta made up of opposition leaders, and the resignation of top military figures (including, but not limited to, General Noriega), all current electoral authorities, and a total overhaul of the judicial system.

● On Jan. 8, retired Panamanian Gen. Rubén Paredes, Jr. told the *Washington Times* that he had sent a new letter to Noriega, threatening that if he did not resign, there would be a "bloodbath" in Panama.

Paredes's interview must be read as a threat from the narcotics mafia. Henry Kissinger's favorite Panamanian military man, Paredes has been a leading asset in Panama of the Colombian cocaine mob of Jorge Ochoa, and has been named as the man who protected operations by the Colombian M-19 terrorists inside Panama. In the early 1980s, the Ochoa family rewarded Paredes with expensive pace horses, for his efforts to build up the opposition, and for looking the other way on the mob's plans to set up Panama as a cocaine-processing center. (Noriega, directing the PDF's anti-drug unit, defeated that mafia plan.)

There is a certain irony in the fact that it was Richard Armitage who was chosen to tell Noriega that he must resign because of allegations that the general is pro-Soviet and linked to narcotics. Armitage was identified as a key figure in the secret government's dirty arms-for-drugs deals, when the Iran-Contra scandal broke in November 1986. A member of the National Security Council's Operations Subgroup and 208 Committee, Armitage was personally involved in the Philippines coup, dealings with Ayatollah Khomeini, and arming the Contras. His links to the secret government stretch back to 1971, when Armitage, then posted to the U.S. office of Naval Operations in South Vietnam, worked closely with the CIA's Theodore Shackley, Thomas Clines, and William Colby—the network which later surfaced as running the Iran-Contra caper.

According to a suit filed against this crowd by the Washington-based Christic Institute, Armitage served as the money-bags for an opium-smuggling ring run by Shackley, Clines, et al., to finance Colby's "Operation Phoenix" assassination program in Vietnam. Armitage became the target of a State Department investigation into heroin trafficking, the suit charges.

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