

U.S. Big Lie on Panama hides deployment for another Vietnam

by Robyn Quijano

The Reagan-Bush administration sent 100 elite forces into Panama at the end of March, for the explicit purpose of kidnaping or assassinating Defense Forces Commander Manuel Antonio Noriega, according to Panamanian sources. One week earlier, George Bush, who could soon be indicted along with fellow Panama-basher Elliott Abrams, for their role in the Iran-Contra affair, told reporters that Noriega should be kidnaped and thus brought to justice in the United States.

Meanwhile, Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, one of the key players in the "get Noriega" command, who has been a loud-mouthed crusader against "corruption" in the Panamanian Defense Forces, has just been accused of taking a \$30,000 "campaign contribution" payoff for doing favors for the scandal-wracked Wedtech corporation. These paragons of morality have determined that the tiny nation of Panama and her 2 million inhabitants should be starved, invaded, and treated to the 1980s version of Teddy Roosevelt's "big stick." And they called it "democracy."

The American public, and most of the rest of the world, have been treated to a "Big Lie" of proportions not seen since Goebbels worked his magic for Hitler. Everyone swallowed the first Big Lie that Noriega leads a narco-military conspiracy. This, despite the fact that he has worked closely with U.S. authorities for years to bring drug traffickers to justice, and caused apoplexy among bankers last year for revoking bank secrecy, when Panama collaborated with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in Operation Pisces to land some big-fish drug money launderers in jail.

But the new Big Lie, if swallowed, will have far greater consequences. The U.S. government and the media, with the help of President-in-Hiding Eric Delvalle, have tried to convince the world that the United States can invade Panama. According to this fantasy, hardly a shot will be fired, and the U.S. will have defeated a monster in a surgical strike like Grenada.

Juan Sosa, Delvalle's ambassador in Washington, and the man the Reagan administration has used as the front man for the President-in-Hiding, told the press on March 22 that any action on the part of the United States is "justifiable." Eduardo Arango, Delvalle's consul general in London, told the press the same day: "Sooner or later the U.S. will have to

intervene. Why not do it now before there are guerrillas in the mountains? Ninety-nine percent of the Panamanian people are praying for U.S. intervention."

He went on to try to entrap the U.S. public in an immoral war we should never have to fight. "There will not be one shot fired," he said, in the most dangerous deception operation. On March 25, Noriega himself answered the Big Lie, warning that if the United States intervenes militarily, it will be a hideous war, a new Vietnam.

The perpetrators of the Big Lie themselves may have started to believe their own propaganda, but in Panama and increasingly throughout Ibero-America, reality is understood. The nationalist project of the late Gen. Omar Torrijos, now continued by Noriega, has the support of the Panamanian workers and peasants, those who had long been disenfranchised by the Panamanian oligarchy. These forces, along with many of their Ibero-American neighbors, are willing and ready to fight a long and bloody war of resistance in defense of the sovereignty of Panama.

The International Relations Secretary of the CONATO, the Panamanian trade union confederation, on tour in Mexico to build support for his nation, reported that General Noriega has the support of the students, workers, and popular sectors as the "standard-bearer of a patriotic struggle which the oligarchy is trying to bury. . . . We are prepared to fight, and confront a possible intervention. We know that there is a high risk. . . . We will pay with deaths, but this is the price we are prepared to pay in defense of our sovereignty."

On March 19, after General Noriega met with State Department officials, they announced that he was "defiant." "He hasn't come to grips with reality."

Unfortunately, it is President Reagan and George Bush who have not come to grips with reality.

On March 19, labor leaders, and peasant organizations met in the National Palace with President Solís Palma, General Noriega and the cabinet. These popular groupings, making up the National Unity Front, demanded: 1) the formation of a war cabinet, 2) the adoption of a contingency plan to assure food supplies, transportation, creation of a Panamanian currency, backed by import-export controls and flight capital controls, 3) confiscation of properties of those participating in seditious activities, 4) military training for all

citizens of appropriate age.

While the U.S. media has puffed up the story that the Panamanian government is receiving arms from Cuba, in order to make a case for a U.S. intervention, the fact is that there are brigades from all over Ibero-America, from right to left, from Mexico to Argentina, who have already pledged their support for the Panmanian resistance against what is clearly seen as an imperialist intervention. Such an anti-colonialist war, however, would surely make Moscow very happy.

The Reagan administration's move against Panama, at a time when U.S. forces are being pulled out of crucial responsibilities in Europe and the Middle East, is part of a New Yalta Pact with Moscow to divvy up the world to Moscow's benefit, as Mexican presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas pointed out in a remarkable statement (see *Dateline Mexico*). But a U.S. imperial move to assert its control over the Western hemisphere would actually create openings for Moscow's irregular warfare already deployed in the region.

Ibero-America responds

President Manuel Solís Palma brought his nation's plight to the world's attention when he addressed the National Assembly of Panama in the presence of the diplomatic corps. He told them that "the governments and the peoples of the world must understand that what is lost in Panama will be a loss to everyone. The beginning as well as the future of the political independence of many Latin American nations are at stake in the Panamanian people's self-determination. The push for domination that Panamanians suffer today must be stopped in Panama, because to remain inactive is to help endanger the respectful coexistence among nations and also peace—at least in this region, at least on this continent."

On March 21, Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid attacked the use of violence and interventionism and noted that the Panamanian people "are the objects of serious violation of international law."

On the same day, the permanent committee of the Peruvian congress attacked the intervention into Panama's internal affairs, and the head of the congress condemned the economic aggression against the government of President Solís Palma. On March 24, the Committee in Defense of Panama's Sovereignty, composed of congressmen, politicians, labor leaders, and lawyers, called for an Ibero-American-wide mobilization in defense of the Solís Palma government.

Committees for the Defense of Panama are springing up throughout the continent, and an extraordinary session of the Latin American Economic System (SELA) will be convened on March 28 to consider emergency aid for Panama. Panama's ambassador in Venezuela, who requested the SELA meeting, said that he would ask for SELA's backing against intervention. When asked about a U.S. invasion, he said: "We recognize that we are not going to defeat them militarily, but they would surely pay a very high price for such an action."

Documentation

Speech by President Manuel Solís Palma

President Manuel Solís Palma spoke to the National Assembly on March 22. We present excerpts of the speech below.

Before all the countries and peoples of the world, I denounce the mockery the U.S. government is making, out of the most basic principles and norms of our national law in this aggression against the Republic of Panama, an aggression which has no comparison in the history of mankind. The Panamanian people and the peoples of Latin America and the world must understand the magnitude of the danger involved in the strategy of domination that the U.S. government is practicing against the people of a small country that has always offered it its friendship, has always contributed to the growth of its wealth, and has always helped increase its power. It is necessary for all to know the truth.

However strong the U.S. government's control is over the news media in the United States and most of the world; however extensive that government's network is in its manipulation of world public opinion—at this terrible hour the Republic of Panama rises up to tell the world that lies will not prevail. Panama's current situation did not happen suddenly. It is not something that happened overnight. It is not an action against a man; it is not a measure against a system; it is not a reaction to the change of a leader. It is the result of a carefully planned strategy of domination calculated over a long period of time and systematically executed with a merciless and base cruelty which will be remembered by many future generations. . . .

Nevertheless, as head of state and the most authoritative voice in Panama, I must now tell our truth, which is the truth and nothing but the truth: The U.S. government wants to prolong its military presence in Panamanian territory beyond the year 2000, disregarding the agreement signed by President Jimmy Carter and Gen. Omar Torrijos Herrera.

The country without drug traffickers that they claim they want, is not what they want. What they want is a country that allows them to have a strategic military outpost in the heart of Latin America. The country without money laundering that they claim they want, is not what they want. What they want is an impoverished, vilified, and subjugated country that will never raise objections to the presence of an unlimited number of U.S. troops on its soil. . . .

This is a nation formed in a nationalist struggle, accustomed to confrontations with the United States, and ready to resist in the defense of the Panamanian nation at any cost and

for any amount of time for the defense of the Panamanian nation. . . .

To place this in the annals of Latin American history, the following are the actions that show the uncontrolled violations of principles and norms of international law—the embargo, the economic blockade, and the threat of using military force against Panama as an instrument of pressure and oppression. . . .

All these actions paint a clear and vivid picture of an undeclared war against the Republic of Panama, against the Panamanian people's will for peace, and against the nation's will to defend the neutrality of the Panama Canal. . . .

The closing of banks and the paralysis of the financial center—both caused by economic aggression of a foreign country which in this way has made a mockery of the trust given to it by Panamanians for 85 years—shows us and the world that our monetary system is vulnerable and, thus, so is our national economy. This closure, which has been a consequence of an arbitrary and illegal dollar embargo affecting not only our national treasury, but also individual depositors from different countries, has abruptly restricted the cash that circulated in the country and has had terrible effects on the economy of Panamanians, who have been deprived of a currency that enabled them to satisfy their basic and daily requirements.

This unprecedented action shames the civilized world, because for the first time it uses the weapon of financial piracy in relations among nations. It also shows there is a need to make a detailed and responsible study of the operational value of our monetary system within the framework of economic reality and our national sovereignty. I firmly believe in this need because the government has the duty to take necessary measures to defend free enterprise and related organizations, such as the banking center that today is temporarily prostrated due to foreign pressures and covert or open political maneuvers. . . .

Whoever knowingly allows and tries to create difficult situations will be working against the Panamanian nation. This cannot be allowed. We have issued a cabinet decree in which we have officially announced that the Republic of Panama is experiencing an undeclared war. We declared a state of emergency throughout the country, but did not suspend constitutional guarantees, which the entire population continues to effectively enjoy. . . .

Panama will enforce compliance with the 1977 Panama Canal Treaty and the Canal Neutrality Treaty regardless of the systematic U.S. violations of these treaties, which have been repeatedly reported by the Panamanian government at all international forums. Panama reasserts before those who signed the neutrality pact with our country, before the nations that shared their anticolonial struggle with Panama, and before the whole world, that its destiny as a sovereign country is irreversible and that its determination to comply and enforce compliance with the treaties is irrevocable. . . .

U.S. plots to take back Panama Canal

by D.E. Pettingell

The Reagan administration's commitment to "rid" Panama of Gen. Manuel A. Noriega, the nationalist commander in chief of the Panama Defense Forces, is now clearly only the prelude to a campaign to destroy—at whatever the price—the Panama Defense Forces itself. It is just as clearly a precondition for revoking the Carter-Torrijos Treaties that were to give total control of the Panama Canal to the Panamanians at midnight Dec. 31, 1999.

The Reagan administration has increasingly shown its total disregard for the treaties. President Reagan's decision to put the fees for canal service into an escrow account, and the deployment of hundreds of American troops to Panama above the levels stipulated in the treaties, are only the two most recent and blatant violations.

General Noriega and the PDF have declared that behind the U.S. aggression is a plot to keep the canal beyond the year 2000. Administration spokesmen such as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliott Abrams, of course, deny that the attack on Noriega is an excuse to abrogate the treaties. But then, Abrams is a liar, even by his own admission, to the Congress.

Abrams recently set two conditions in order for the United States to honor the treaties: 1) that Panama becomes fully "democratized" and, 2) that the Panama Defense Forces demonstrate their ability to "defend" the canal by withdrawing from "political life."

The type of "democratic" government Abrams would impose in Panama would ask the United States to keep the canal, turning the treaties into a dead letter. The "Panamanians" whom Abrams is attempting to put in power have already asked the United States to invade their country.

Abrams's socialists cronies

"Panama must democratize, and that is part of the Carter-Torrijos agreements. It is not written down, but clearly in the