

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### Renewed offensive against Noriega

*The waning Reagan presidency, and the Massachusetts liberals of the Dukakis camp, share the same really dumb idea.*

President Ronald Reagan telephoned former Panamanian President Eric Delvalle Dec. 6, "to reaffirm U.S. policy toward Panama and to express support for President Delvalle," said White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater. Delvalle, who was impeached and dismissed by Panama's Congress last March for violating the Constitution, is still recognized as President of Panama by the United States, the only country in the world to do so.

Reagan's call to Delvalle, who has been in Miami meeting with leaders of Panama's State Department-sponsored opposition, was to bolster a renewed drive to destabilize Panama and to try to force the removal of Gen. Manuel Noriega, the nationalist commander of Panama's Defense Forces.

As reported here last week, the outgoing Reagan administration would like to launch a last-ditch effort to clear up the Panama imbroglio before George Bush takes office.

The plan put into effect is to meld the squabbling opposition forces into a unified coalition, that will exercise political pressure and carry out violent street action in the hopes of provoking the PDF officer corps itself to stage a coup against their commander, Noriega. If this fails, the unified opposition would provide the fig leaf to justify a direct United States military intervention, as proposed by liberal Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry.

Under the personal supervision of Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams, the first step was accomplished on Nov. 22, when, after meet-

ing for several days in Miami, representatives of several opposition parties issued a "unity" document, in which they agreed Noriega and President Manuel Solís Palma would go, and a "provisional government" would preside over national elections.

One of the key framers of the document was reportedly Carlos Rodríguez, former candidate to Panama's vice presidency and co-owner and top executive of Miami's Dadeland National Bank, a bank cited in U.S. courts for drug-money laundering. Rodríguez met with representatives of U.S. President-elect George Bush, who approved the deal. The Panamanian daily *Mediodía* reported Nov. 30 that Bush's people said "they will have solved the problem with Panama by Jan. 20, 1989, but they needed to have the opposition abandon its radical attitude and open up 'the political spectrum' to allow other sectors to participate in a government of national reconciliation."

In an open attempt to incite the PDF to betray Noriega, the opposition changed its previous stance that the armed forces be replaced by an unarmed police force. The new document vows that the PDF's "institutional integrity will be respected." And, contrary to prior demands that not only Noriega but also the entire high command be removed, the new line is that the chain of command will stay intact. As opposition Christian Democratic Party leader Ricardo Arias Calderón explained: "We feel that it is preferable for the PDF to make these changes

according to their regulations, their personnel situation, and their own evaluation of the current military leadership's conduct."

But in case the PDF does not take the bait, former labor leader and opposition figure Isaac Rodríguez delivered an ultimatum that there would be "no alternative other than non-peaceful struggle." Rodríguez made his threat from Spain, where he fled after getting caught with funds sent from the United States to sabotage Panama's electrical system.

And on Dec. 1, U.S. Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) said that the United States should revive Teddy Roosevelt's "big stick" against Panama, to "protect American interests" in the Canal Zone. Kerry, a stalwart of Project Democracy—the "parallel government" body that runs U.S. foreign policy—told the Democratic Women's Club in Washington that the United States should "hold out the possibility of military action when it is truly needed," as in the case of Panama.

A liberal, who says that any attempt to cast problems in Latin America in terms of East-West confrontation, is "a bad definition of national security," Kerry nonetheless charged Noriega is "Cubanizing" Panama, cutting deals with Fidel Castro and Libya, and "getting rid of the middle class." Kerry also repeated the lie that Noriega is a "drug kingpin."

Instead of "putting billions of dollars into Salvador and Nicaragua, into extraordinary military expenditure and loss of life," said Kerry, the United States should use military force against Panama.

"I can't think of a greater rationale for keeping a military option on the table, particularly when you have a treaty which requires you to protect property and life with respect to our interest in the Panama Canal."