

Ibero-American nations in uproar over U.S. gunboat diplomacy

by Mark Sonnenblick

George Bush's belligerency against Ibero-America, even after the seizure of Panama's Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, has evoked outrage and fear throughout the continent. "Who is next? and when?" the Mexican weekly *Impacto* inquired. Its editorial asks, "What would prevent [the United States] from also attacking Mexico in case it felt the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to be of strategic value, or any other reason they felt like? Let's not fool ourselves. What happened to Panama could happen to any other Latin American country."

Carlos Chagas, a syndicated columnist plugged into the Brazilian military, wrote Jan. 11 that the Brazilian foreign ministry and armed forces general staff had each warned President José Sarney that the U.S. action in Panama created a "dangerous precedent." Chagas asks, "Now that the United States has inaugurated a new phase of its foreign strategy with the Big Stick in hand, justifying the most absurd interventions to catch traffickers or politicians accused of [trafficking], who will guarantee that tomorrow it does not mobilize its paratroops or its Marines on the pretext of 'saving the lungs of the world'—that is, to internationalize the Amazon?"

Chagas outlined the events of late December: "First they invaded Panama . . . which resulted in more than a thousand deaths. Then, they decided to set up a naval blockade on Colombia. . . . This U.S. escalation reveals its government's willingness to make itself into the gendarme of the Western world."

On Jan. 7-9, NBC ran a three-part soap opera on the murder of Drug Enforcement Agent Enrique Camarena. On the first night, NBC News ominously claimed that "there is a Noriega in every Mexican location."

After the Jan. 8 psycho-drama, Tom Brokaw asked drug czar William Bennett, "If Bush had been President in 1985, instead of Reagan, would he have invaded Mexico militarily like he did to Panama?" The Mexican government, in response, accused NBC of "disinformation," and the Mexican Congress swore Jan. 10 it would impede any further unilateral U.S. military invasions of Mexico or any other Latin American country to "fight drugs" or on any other pretext.

Rio de Janeiro's *Tribuna da Imprensa* asked on Jan. 11, "How is the reality of the hard line in Central America and the Caribbean—the return to gunboat diplomacy and the Big

Stick—compatible, in U.S. foreign policy logic, with the end of the Cold War, determined by the new American-Soviet strategic understanding? . . . The historical clock seems to be turning back to the most opprobrious of armed interventions," the valiant anti-drug Colombian daily *El Espectador* lamented in its Jan. 7 editorial.

Retired Venezuelan general Román Rojas Cabot, the former commander of the border defense force, wrote in the Caracas daily *El Nacional* on Jan. 9, "The task of the Latin American countries is to have responsible governments on this continent which convince the United States that relations between them be that of partners, of republics which respect each other in the spirit of the original Monroe Doctrine, which was later perverted to make the U.S. into the region's policeman." Rojas argued that if gunboat diplomacy were repeated, as by sending the *U.S.S. Kennedy* to blockade Colombia, "the Latin American peoples would be right to rise up violently. This is nationalism which surges in a forced self-defense and which must not be delayed."

General Rojas damned Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez for being "one of the few unconditional [puppets] of Washington" by abstaining from condemning the invasion of Panama at the Organization of American States. He concluded, "The Venezuelan government appears literally beside itself, subjecting itself to foreign bankers on economic policy and following alien footsteps on international policy, all adorned with interminable activism and word-mongering."

Social Democrat Carlos Andrés Pérez and the region's other Presidents are caught between a rock and a hard place. All of them have created economic disasters and widespread discontent by following International Monetary Fund policies. By doing little to defend the principle of sovereignty, they lost their last shred of republican legitimacy. Some of these governments may soon cease to exist.

Peru was the only country to withdraw its ambassador from Washington, and that was because its President, Alan García, was given no choice by his armed forces. Argentine President Carlos Menem's "free market economics" have paralyzed the economy. To remain in power, he may have to call upon military nationalists. Economic and social conditions in Brazil and Mexico are also approaching the point of

no return.

Is the United States going to misuse its military potential trying to collect debt for the big New York banks, like it did in the "dollar diplomacy" of the first three decades of this century? This was asked by Mexican commentator Sergio de la Peña in *Excélsior* on Jan. 10. "The main problem which faces Latin America in 1990 is not Bush's outburst in Panama, which sooner or later will backfire on him internally and externally until his lust for bluster is chilled. The real gambit for Latin America this year is posed by the combination of internal neoliberalism and external financial encirclement." He called for Ibero-America's "collective negotiation and response toward the creditors." Retired Brazilian Adm. Armando Vidigal spoke at a conference in Chile, where he also urged collective negotiation of the debt.

Nationalist resurgence

In every country, defenders of republicanism are now mobilized in defense of their national sovereignty. Colombian President Virgilio Barco forced the Bushmen to cancel—or at least postpone—their threat of a naval blockade of his country. No Spanish-speaking republic, with the exception of Guatemala, has succumbed to U.S. pressures to formally recognize the Endara regime installed by U.S. military might in Panama.

Thousands of people demonstrated in Mexican cities. Hundreds of walls bore slogans; solidarity committees were formed. The Mexican Labor Party (PLM) has distributed 300,000 leaflets warning, "Any pusillanimous Ibero-American government which recognizes puppet Guillermo Endara and his gang as 'Panama's government' will be swept away just like the communist governments of Eastern Europe."

The PLM leaflet insisted, "The only way to immediately stop the massacre in Panama and expel the Yankee troops is to declare the immediate suspension of foreign debt payments to all U.S. and British banks and those of any country which recognizes the spurious and drug trafficking government of Guillermo Endara. Mexico should do that first and insist the remaining Ibero-American countries do the same." It also demanded the immediate formation of an Ibero-American Common Market. Thousands of Mexicans signed the leaflet and sent it to President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

In the name of 12 members of the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM), Patricio Estévez spoke to the Mexican Chamber of Deputies Dec. 28, comparing the slanders of Noriega with those thrown against Mexican President Benito Juárez in 1862 by Hapsburg Emperor Maximilian, to justify his invasion of Mexico (see *Documentation*). On Jan. 4 the Chamber passed a resolution demanding no recognition of the illegal Endara regime.

Meanwhile, Rio's maverick *Tribuna da Imprensa* has been trying to shatter what it calls "the conspiracy of silence," imposed by most of the media. *Tribuna* editor Mario Jakobs-

kind wrote on Jan. 9, "In sum, the facts in Panama show that the U.S. plan was to conquer the whole region." *Jornal do Brasil* broke the truth (from an *EIR* press release) about the Endara gang being up to its armpits in drug money laundering. It also reported candidly on the contempt the majority of Panamanians have for Endara and the tiny, wealthy, racist oligarchy he represents. Why did *Jornal*'s reporter—unlike the hundreds of others dispatched there—give an independent report from Panama? Perhaps because he was beaten up by U.S. troops when trying to cover their invasion of the Nicaraguan ambassador's residence on Dec. 29.

Shortly after the invitation, Sen. Robert Dole chortled about Nicaraguan and Cuban Presidents "not sleeping a wink" in expectation their countries would also be invaded. But despite the senator's euphoria, the real benefactor of the resurgence of naked U.S. imperialism may well be the communists. Bush's actions seem to have rallied a hungry and tired Nicaraguan people in support of Sandinista clown-thug Danny Ortega. The Cuban people were watching Eastern Europe, wondering when Fidel Castro, too, would fall. Now, Castro's exhortations to rally round him to defend Cuba from "Yankee Imperialism" no longer have a hollow ring. Only George Bush could have saved the aging dictator; that's what seems to have happened.

Documentation

Excerpts from an address by Mexican Federal Deputy Patricio Estévez to the Chamber of Deputies on Dec. 28, in the name of the 12 members of the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) in the Chamber:

The Panama situation has been worsening in favor of the barbarism unleashed by the invasion of the decadent empire of the North against the respect, the morality, and the autonomy of the peoples of Latin America and the peoples of the world.

As a result of this bloody invasion, thousands of Panamanian civilians have died in the name of an artificial morality invoked by the government of butcher Bush. The Guillermo Endara puppet government is not supported by the majority of the Panamanian people and should not be recognized by our Government. . . .

[Benito] Juárez was slandered with the same monstrous vituperations the empire today adjudicates to Noriega, except that of drug trafficker. Afterwards, the empires invade; after the Juárez slander came the bloody invasion [of Austrian prince Maximilian in 1862]. And after the heroic defensive struggle, we managed to shoot Maximilian on Cerro de las Campanas and expel the invaders. . . .