

Will the U.S. invade Mexico next? CIA, DEA and NBC in the Camarena case

by Isaiás Amezcua

Between Jan. 7 and 9, the National Broadcasting Corporation presented a prime-time mini-series on the February 1985 assassination of Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique Camarena, in Guadalajara, Mexico. Contrary to the widespread propaganda about it in the United States, the purpose of the NBC series was not to “reopen” the Camarena case, but to issue a threat of invasion against Mexico under the pretext of fighting drugs.

The television series itself was typical of the dozens of evening police “dramas” that seem to captivate America’s adolescent couch-potatoes each night. DEA agents were presented as Rambo-style “good guys” versus a brown, mustachioed, many-headed monster which—paradoxically—was not the drug trade but rather “Mexican corruption.”

The series posed no threat to the current Mexican government. In fact, it was broadcast simultaneously in Mexico by cable television services. Further, in the previous two months, the Spanish-language edition of Elaine Shannon’s book *Desperados*, upon which the NBC mini-series was based, had been circulated throughout the country—a good indication that the government had no intention of trying to block its revelations. This is especially important because the book contains much more information than the six-hour mini-series presented, information which in fact points to George Bush’s Central Intelligence Agency as responsible for at least a partial coverup of the true authors of the Camarena murder.

More U.S. saber-rattling

Since the Bush administration therefore has no interest in opening the Pandora’s box that is the Camarena case, one is led to the inescapable conclusion that the officially sanctioned NBC presentation was intended as a very real threat of invasion against Mexico. That threat was clearly understood by the Mexican government and by the country’s political establishment, as reflected in the commentary of journalist Alvaro Cepeda which appeared in the daily *La Jornada* Jan. 16. “The conditions for a possible invasion,” Cepeda wrote, “are being put into place with the rigor and precision demanded by an undertaking of that magnitude.”

The Mexican government protested the “slanderous” pro-invasion commentaries by NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw

which followed each portion of the series—a protest to which NBC granted a miserable 10 seconds of coverage on its Jan. 10 Nightly News. NBC also issued its own communiqué claiming that the government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari had refused to send a representative to be interviewed by Brokaw, and had instead “suggested” that NBC interview former government official Guido Belsasso, who is currently a researcher at San Diego University’s Institute of the Americas. Belsasso, it turned out, was in fact interviewed on Jan. 8 by Brokaw; but to everyone’s surprise, the interview was cut short by the NBC “newscaster” at the very moment when Belsasso was revealing the chain of successes the current Mexican government has had against the drug trade.

Perhaps most serious of all is that NBC’s owners succeeded in what they had—wittingly or not—set out to accomplish: the irreparable damage of collaborative relations between U.S. and Mexican anti-drug authorities. That damage is already being celebrated as a victory by the drug cartels, and will surely lead to an increase in drug-related deaths on both sides of the border.

CIA protected Camarena’s assassins

A careful reading of the Shannon book reveals a shocking truth, which the NBC series not accidentally ignored, namely, that the DEA was unable to get to the heart of Camarena’s assassination because the CIA maintained close, collaborative, and friendly relations with some of those involved in the crime itself.

Shannon’s book, based on information from DEA agents, reveals that the order to kidnap Camarena was given by cartel boss Ernesto Fonseca on the morning of Feb. 7, 1985. According to Shannon, Fonseca sent a group of his hitmen to the American consulate in Guadalajara, headed by Samuel Ramírez Razo, who was an agent of Mexico’s Federal Security Administration (DFS), also known as the Mexican CIA. Ramírez Razo and his thugs intercepted Camarena exiting the consulate, and flashed their DFS credentials at him (*Desperados*, Spanish edition, p. 282).

On April 7, 1985, the Mexican Army arrested Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, along with 17 hitmen armed with bazookas and grenades, in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco. Both Fonseca and his gunmen were found in possession of DFS credentials. In

June 1985, the Costa Rican anti-narcotics police arrested another Mexican drug chieftain, Rafael Caro Quintero, considered the material assassin of Camarena, with numerous associates. All bore credentials identifying them as DFS agents.

The credentials confirmed rumors that had been circulating since October 1984, when the Mexican Army raided vast marijuana fields in El Búfalo and arrested several active agents of the DFS, that there was collaboration between elements of the DFS and the country's drug traffickers. Further, they provided unmistakable evidence that there were DFS links to the traffickers who had participated in the Camarena assassination. DFS director at the time was Antonio Zorrilla Pérez.

The DEA vs. the CIA

Despite the long-standing evidence of corruption, the CIA station at the U.S. embassy in Mexico maintained close ties with Zorrilla Pérez. This friendship, in fact, triggered a brawl between the DEA and CIA offices in Mexico. In her book, Shannon writes that DEA sources had revealed to her that "the CIA agents in Mexico 'had had a falling out with the DEA agents in Mexico, concerning relations between the CIA and DFS' " (pp. 259-61).

The scandal did not stop there. Days after it was learned that Camarena had been kidnaped, the DEA officially requested the collaboration of all U.S. intelligence services, to locate their agent and rescue him alive. Still more shocking, the CIA delayed for two long and precious months in releasing its first intelligence leads gathered on Camarena's kidnaping. Camarena was kidnaped on Feb. 7, and, according to Shannon's book, the CIA released its first information on April 17, 1985, long after Camarena's death (pp. 259-61).

What could be the explanation for such a serious intelligence failure on the CIA's part? Perhaps it can be found in existing evidence that the CIA was protecting important drug traffickers like Zorrilla because they were serving as CIA informants or agents.

On Nov. 21, 1986, the *Washington Times* revealed that the CIA retained information on drug traffickers who might have been involved in the Camarena assassination, because "they were concerned that the Justice Department's accusations would expose CIA agents and informants in Mexico."

On Dec. 19 of the same year, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that at a Justice Department meeting held the previous month on the Camarena case, "the CIA argued . . . in favor of keeping the information secret, on the premise that to release it would compromise the agency's 'sources and methods,' and its ability to operate inside Mexico."

In Mexico, there are many who believe that Zorrilla worked with the CIA in illegal clandestine operations of financing and support for the Nicaraguan Contras, among other things.

On May 13, 1989, the Salinas government surprised

many by arresting Zorrilla—who by then was ex-director of the DFS—as the alleged intellectual author of the Mexico City assassination of renowned journalist Manuel Buendía. During the following days, Zorrilla was accused of association with traffickers Caro Quintero, Fonseca Carrillo, and Miguel Félix Gallardo, the chief honchos of the Mexican drug trade. All three are currently prisoners, along with a group of former policemen linked to Zorrilla.

U.S. starts 'Noriega treatment' on Mexico

by Carlos Valdez

The NBC broadcast of the Jan. 7-9 series "Drug Wars, the Camarena Story" marked the beginning of the Bush administration's "Noriega treatment" of Mexico. The intention of the propaganda war is to eliminate, through a supposed war against drugs, any remaining pockets of resistance to the genocidal policies dictated through the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

The program's message was direct enough. In the words of NBC anchor Tom Brokaw, "Camarena was assassinated because he was investigating not only drug trafficking, but also the corruption of the drug trade and how high it reached in the Mexican police, Army, and government. U.S. officials assert that, *as in Panama*, matters of drugs and corruption in Mexico continue to be deep-rooted. *And in nearly every area of that country, there is a local Noriega, a comandante, a governor enriching himself through deals with the Colombian cartel chiefs to bring cocaine, through Mexico, into the United States*" (emphasis added).

Even Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari was called on the carpet. Brokaw reminded the audience that Salinas "promised to attack official corruption linked to the drug trade" and that although "the Mexican police have seized record amounts of cocaine during this period . . . U.S. police authorities say that despite all the government's promises, Mexico has still not permitted the United States to pursue traffickers' planes into Mexican territory. *Without a doubt, the trafficking routes that agent Camarena was trying to shut down continue in full operation, even protected by the same corrupt officials that Camarena wanted to entrap*" (emphasis added).

Bush administration's blessing

The NBC series had the implicit blessing of the U.S. government. Not only has Washington not issued a single comment on the series, but during the three days it was