

# Group of Rio shames Panama's Endara

by Robyn Quijano

A diplomatic brawl between Panamanian "President" Guillermo Endara and the Mexican government nearly culminated in a break in relations between the two nations, following the March 30 communiqué of the "Group of Rio" which called on Panama to carry out a "popular consultation without foreign interference," and urged the Endara government to respect the right of asylum and the immunity of diplomatic missions.

The seven foreign ministers of what was once known as the Group of Eight met in Mexico City, and refused to readmit Panama to its fold, while harshly attacking the U.S. occupation of that nation. "Foreign troops need to confine their activities solely to their military bases, as called for in the treaties signed by the United States and Panama, and refrain from carrying out actions for which the Panamanians are responsible," emphasized the ministers.

After Mexican Foreign Minister Fernando Solana read the communiqué, the rotund puppet Guillermo Endara broke all norms of diplomacy and started a cock fight with Solana and Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Endara, screaming in uncontrolled rage, charged Solana with being part of a government in power through "electoral tricks" (a reference to the fraud-riddled July 1988 election of Salinas).

Now that Panama has a legitimate government, Endara cried on Panamanian TV on March 31, the Mexican foreign minister "comes to say *mil pendejadas*," which could be translated as "a bunch of crap" or worse, an insulting vulgarity in Mexico which would not be printed in the press, much less screamed by one President against another on national television. Now the Mexicans come to meddle in Panamanian politics, protested Endara. "Keep your nose out, Mexican Foreign Minister," he shouted.

## Thieves fall out?

The brawl, seen by some as a falling-out among thieves, was in reality between a puppet government imposed by the Thornburgh Doctrine, and a government that fears that the Thornburgh Doctrine will be used next obliterate their own sovereignty. A press release issued by the Mexican foreign ministry the next day denied that Solana issued any personal statements or statements in the name of the Mexican govern-

ment about Panama and its authorities, but emphasized that the Mexican government stands behind the communiqué of the Group of Rio. The group was apparently split on whether or not to readmit Panama, and rumor has it that the Venezuelan foreign minister leaked private statements by Solana to Endara, causing the explosion of the unstable Endara.

The "Frentes Políticos" column of Mexico's largest daily newspaper *Excelsior*, which is said to represent government views, blasted the Panamanian regime. "The words of 'Mr.' Endara leave no doubt: Mexico continues to be the target desired by the United States for permanent subjugation." Behind Endara's attack on the Mexican foreign minister "is the immense power of the government which made him de facto President of Panama through a military intervention," states the commentary. *Frentes Políticos* blasts Endara for refusing to reply to Mexico's request for a safe-conduct pass for the former head of Panama's national bank, who took asylum in the Mexican embassy during the U.S. invasion. The request for safe conduct "was referred to the [U.S.] Southern Command, which is the true government of Panama. Accordingly, Mexico should request the safe conduct from the head of the Southern Command," it says.

"Mexico's position is unchangeable: If it does not recognize a government installed by a foreign military intervention, much less will it request the safe conduct, precisely from that foreign force, which is illegal and oppressive."

## Panama's 300-pound Gandhi

The Mexican daily *La Jornada* noted that "it is painful to see Guillermo Endara's obsession for the world to accept not only his government, but his existence." *La Jornada* lampooned Endara's two-week hunger strike, ostensibly conducted to convince Washington to deliver financial aid, by citing a joke making the rounds in Panama: "The one thing that the invasion and its puppet government have gained is . . . a Gandhi ! and one of 300 pounds! Ours weighs three times more than India's Gandhi. A tiny little country like our own, with a little more than 2 million people, must feel proud to have its own Mahatma Gandhi."

After the brawl began to cool down, the pathetic puppet government begged to be treated better by its neighbors. Panamanian Foreign Minister Julio Linares answered the Group of Rio communiqué by stating no new elections would be held, and defending the deployment of U.S. occupation forces throughout Panama as "an issue that falls within the competence and jurisdiction of the Panamanian state and no foreign country can dictate to us the norms of conduct."

To protest the Group of Rio communiqué as "foreign intervention" while the Bush administration's army occupies Panama might seem an odd defense. But stranger still is Linares's contention, reported in *La Estrella de Panama* on April 4, that the Group of Rio wronged Panama, which was the "victim" of the U.S. military invasion, instead of condemning the "victimario" or aggressor—the United States!