

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

U.S. orders Panama to forgo army

The plan to demilitarize Panama is a test case for the line that Ibero-America's militaries are inherently corrupt.

Gen. Marc Cisneros, head of U.S. Army South which is occupying Panama, said that Panama should not have an Army. "I don't believe there is any need for an army here," and Panama "does not have to worry about being invaded by anyone," Cisneros, one of the commanders of the U.S. invasion of Dec. 20, told a conference May 24 at Panama's exclusive Union Club.

Cisneros, the U.S. acting military proconsul in Panama, said that the Public Force, the new constabulary that replaced the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF), is more than adequate, and suggested that a restored PDF would pose a danger to democracy from a "corrupt" military.

Ironically, U.S. authorities ensured the appointment of Col. Eduardo Herrera, an admitted CIA agent who reportedly played a role in the transfer last year of a cache of weapons obtained by Israeli Col. Yair Klein (ret.) to Colombian cocaine kingpin Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, as commander of the Public Force.

Panama's constitution is being rewritten to abolish its sovereign right to an army, and military installations of the former PDF, including the air base at Río Hato and Fort Amador, will be replaced by luxury hotels. At Amador, the resort project reportedly includes a land bridge to El Chorrillo, the slum area destroyed in the invasion which will now be rebuilt with high-priced condominiums and hotels.

But it is not a case of beating swords into plowshares. While Panama will be denied its own army, there will be armed forces in Panama—U.S. forces. The 1977 Carter-Torrijos treaties call for Panama to be fully capable

of defending the Canal when its jurisdiction is transferred at the end of the century. Without an army, Panama will probably have to grant the U.S. extended basing rights. As General Cisneros reminded his audience: "We have a responsibility to defend the Canal and the interests of those who run the Canal, and we want to do it with the goodwill of the government."

Julio Linares, Foreign Minister in the U.S.-installed Panamanian government, said that the U.S. "is hinting" that it wants to occupy certain areas of Panama, according to the May 28 *El Siglo*. Linares said that "it is an undeniable truth that Panama has been a country occupied by the Army of the United States since Dec. 20," although he blamed this on the former head of the PDF, Gen. Manuel Noriega, reported *La Estrella* May 27.

Linares confirmed that the U.S. has claimed the right for its Coast Guard to patrol Panama's territorial waters, and it also wants to install a submarine base in Panama, according to *La Estrella* May 29. Troops from the U.S. Special Operations Command have been carrying out maneuvers in the jungle province of Darien, preparing for a possible invasion of Colombia, supposedly to fight drugs, the paper noted.

In fact, U.S. policy for all of Ibero-America is to replace national armies with constabulary forces such as that being organized in Panama. Their primary role will be to wage war against their own people, already suffering from International Monetary Fund-ordered austerity.

These native constabularies will be subordinated to the U.S. Armed

Forces, whose mission is being redefined from defending the U.S. and the West from the Soviet Union, to acting as imperialist enforcers for the emerging U.S.-U.S.S.R. condominium. U.S. Army Gen. Carl Vuono said, according to the *New York Times* May 21, "the fight against the drug trade and the guarantee of democratic regimes in Latin America will be the Army's main priorities just as soon as the two superpowers conclude arms reduction agreements."

Cisneros's boss, Gen. Maxwell "Mad Max" Thurman, head of the Panama-based U.S. Southern Command, toured South America in mid-May to demand that all the nations of the hemisphere slash their budgets and reorganize themselves to fight "the two most important enemies": drug-trafficking and internal subversion. According to the Argentine daily *Clarín* May 17 and 18, Thurman let it be known that the U.S. will intervene "practically directly" in Colombia, since the situation there is so "grave."

U.S. Ambassador to Panama Deane Hinton told the American Chamber of Commerce in Panama on May 30 that the U.S. still has some key tasks to complete in Panama, among them "our role in the conversion of the former Defense Forces into a National Police Force" whose primary focus would be "internal security." Hinton said that to instill the proper mind-set into the new Panamanian police, the U.S. is providing training through the U.S. Justice Department ICITAP program, reported *La Prensa* June 1.

That is, Panama's police will be indoctrinated in the principles of democracy and the war on drugs by the same Justice Department of U.S. Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, whose top aides—Henry G. Barr and Richard Guida—face indictments for cocaine trafficking and use.