

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

A lesson in hypocrisy

The massive manhunt for Noriega's top aide shows that Panama is still an occupied nation.

On Sept. 16, Capt. Asunción Eliecer Gaytán, a top aide of Gen. Manuel Noriega, was reported missing from the Vatican's Embassy in Panama, where he had been granted diplomatic asylum since the U.S. invasion of last Dec. 20. Gaytán's presumed escape immediately set off a manhunt "by land, by air, and by sea," according to the Panamanian press.

Guess who is carrying out this manhunt? "Troops of the U.S. military Southern Command together with members of Panama's Public Force," according to the Sept. 18 daily *El Siglo*. So, it turns out that the U.S. troops who invaded Panama have not withdrawn after all, despite the Bush administration's claims to the contrary.

The Gaytán incident highlights the hypocrisy of the U.S. administration and its sycophants in the news media. Some weeks ago, news anchormen Ted Koppel and Barbara Walters raked Iraqi Ambassador to the U.S. Mohamed al-Mashat over the coals, because he dared compare his country's military moves in Kuwait to the U.S. invasion of Panama.

Their disclaimer, now repeated as a sort of magical incantation by supporters of the deployment against Iraq, goes something like this: "The U.S. did not occupy Panama, as Iraq did Kuwait. The U.S. did not violate Panama's independence; it simply helped Panamanians to exercise democracy, by helping into office the government that had been freely elected by the majority of the Panamanian people, but which dictator Noriega prevented from coming to power."

Last time we looked, Panamanians were constitutionally impeded from voting in U.S. elections; they most assuredly did not elect George Bush or his representatives as their government. Yet, there was Deane Hinton, U.S. ambassador in Panama, issuing instructions to the figurehead "President of Panama," Guillermo "Porky" Endara, and telling the press that "the U.S. government is very interested in capturing Gaytán," reported the Spanish news agency ACAN-EFE.

To be fair to Bush, he is not the only hypocrite among world leaders. While the manhunt for Gaytán was getting under way, French President François Mitterrand was announcing his dispatching of thousands of soldiers to Saudi Arabia, and threw out some Iraqi diplomats from France, calling on the United Nations to impose an air blockade against Iraq.

The ostensible reason for the French rage, was that Iraqi soldiers allegedly violated a French diplomatic residence in Kuwait, an incident which the Iraqis deny ever took place.

But, where was France when the United States violated the diplomatic rights of Cuba, Libya, Nicaragua, Peru, and the Vatican in Panama? On Dec. 29, and again on Dec. 31, U.S. troops raided the residences of Nicaraguan diplomats in Panama, including that of the ambassador himself.

Cuba's ambassador to Panama, Lazaro Mora, was detained by American GIs for 90 minutes "because he refused to allow his car to be searched," on Jan. 14, said an Ameri-

can military spokesman. His passport was confiscated, as were those of three of his aides who were detained with him. They were later returned.

On Jan. 9, Peru's Foreign Minister Guillermo Larco Cox complained that the U.S. had sent "a whole battalion" to surround the residence of the Peruvian ambassador to Panama. The troops bombarded the residence with rock and roll and barricaded the streets to block the free flow of traffic and pedestrians. The only time the barricades were removed was to allow a daily rent-a-mob to shout insults at the diplomats and those who had been given asylum inside. This went on until March 3, when the mob burned down the Peruvian Embassy.

The rent-a-mobs were also sent around to complement the U.S. soldiers who were surrounding the Vatican's Embassy and bombarding it with rock and roll, because General Noriega had sought sanctuary inside. In fact, Noriega agreed to surrender to the U.S. Army only after the puppet government ordered all public employees to a demonstration demanding that the Vatican turn Noriega out of the diplomatic residence. Of course, there was also the implied threat that the U.S. would break into the embassy. "I'm sure that made an impact on his deciding to walk out instead of us having to go get him," said the U.S. commander, Gen. Marc Cisneros, on Jan. 4.

A few days after the invasion started, France joined the U.S. and Britain in vetoing a U.N. resolution that merely "deplored" the U.S. military action. On Jan. 17, the U.S. vetoed another U.N. resolution censuring its raid on the home the Nicaraguan ambassador in Panama. To allow the resolution to go through "would trivialize the work of this important body," said Thomas Pickering, the U.S. envoy to the U.N.