

Editorial

Lest we forget

We have moved one step closer to world war as a result of the French response to what was at most a minor diplomatic incident, which, incidentally, the Iraqis deny having occurred: a violation of the diplomatic residence in Kuwait by Iraqi troops.

According to our best knowledge, the French, Belgian, and Canadian diplomats were escorted back to their embassy compounds from the home of a Kuwaiti associate of the Kuwaiti royal family, where they had assembled. Even if the accounts of Iraqi troops entering the home of diplomats and taking them into temporary custody were true, the fact remains that the response of an escalation toward total war was entirely disproportionate to the supposed offense. One can only assume that the French were waiting for such a pretext in order to justify giving full support to the Anglo-American military adventure in the Gulf.

Not too long ago, much more egregious violations of diplomatic immunity occurred in Panama, when American forces violated the diplomatic rights of other nations with impunity. This included the arrest of personnel, blasting the Peruvian and Vatican embassies with rock music, and the unleashing of mobs against the Cuban, Peruvian, and Vatican embassies. It is well to review some of this material in detail.

On Jan. 4 of this year, U.S. troops detained a Cuban diplomat, Victor Hernández González, as he left the Cuban ambassador's residence in Panama. The ambassador himself was briefly detained by U.S. troops.

Even more gross violations occurred against the Nicaraguan government, which asked for an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Jan. 3. In a letter to the president of the Security Council, Deputy U.N. Ambassador Daysi Moncada Bermúdez referred to two incidents by U.S. forces in Panama, which, she said, violated diplomatic immunity. The first was the raid on the residence of Nicaraguan Ambassador Antenor Ferrey. The second was entering the apartment of two diplomatic functionaries, Omar Pineda and María Teresa López. This occurred last Dec. 31.

The U.S. government, far from denying these inci-

dents, flaunted them. About 30 U.S. troops ransacked Ferrey's house and then displayed a weapons cache which they claimed had been found on the premises. The State Department claimed that they had not known that the building was a diplomatic residence, but such a disclaimer was preposterous, since diplomatic markings were clearly in evidence.

Ferrey protested the incident while it was proceeding, but the colonel in charge communicated this to his superiors and was instructed to carry on with the raid. The embassy was entered, and the ambassador was struck and knocked to the ground.

It is well to remember that the United Nations did pass a resolution deploring the U.S. invasion of Panama. The resolution passed the General Assembly by a vote of 75-20; however, it was vetoed by the United States, Britain, and France.

The report that Gen. Manuel Noriega had "voluntarily" surrendered himself to the United States, leaving the sanctuary of the home of Papal Nuncio in Panama, ignores the circumstance that the United States was threatening to storm the residence of the Nuncio and remove Noriega by force.

Reuters press service, on Jan. 4, reported that Gen. Marc Cisneros, commander of the U.S. Southern Command, said the nine days during which the Army surrounded the residence and blared satanic rock music at top volume, were intended to persuade Noriega to walk out voluntarily, "in order to avoid the issue of troops going into an embassy, and particularly one of the Vatican." Cisneros underscored the point: "Obviously to Noriega, seeing the forces out there put pressure on him. I'm sure that made an impact on his deciding to walk out instead of us having to go get him."

On Jan. 31, Panama's *La Estrella* reported that two Panamanian bishops were charging that between 5,000 and 7,000 Panamanians had been killed as a result of the U.S. invasion, and not the 500 claimed by the U.S. Southern Command. Former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark corroborated the accusation in a statement from Panama on Jan. 6, when he charged that the U.S. media were engaged in a "conspiracy of silence."