

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

Is U.S. facing guerrilla war?

Purported insurgent leader Capt. Eliecer Gaitán has bested American forces in the past; will he do it again?

The day after Christmas, *EIR* received by fax a message inciting Panamanian soldiers to take up arms against the U.S. occupation army, to all appearances signed by the former security chief for Gen. Manuel Noriega, Capt. Eliecer Gaitán. A few days earlier, in a call to Radio Ancón on Dec. 11, Captain Gaitán announced the establishment of a guerrilla operation to drive the Americans out of Panama.

Gaitán's message is addressed to "my brother officers and the soldiers of the Panamanian Fatherland," and it is issued in the name of "those of us who we are determined to initiate armed struggle against the occupation forces and against the traitors who let themselves be used for the consolidation of the situation of submission of our people and Yankee presence in Panama perpetuates itself." He calls on the former members of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF), particularly those currently serving in the Public Force, the U.S.-created constabulary, to "unite in a single battle front."

This movement, it says, will fight "1) against the occupation of the Fatherland's soil, 2) against the oligarchy's handing over the Fatherland to U.S. economic interests, 3) against the gradual destruction of popular and labor organizations by means of the elimination of the gains they won in their historic struggles." Gaitán calls on the former PDF officers and soldiers to "refuse to repress the activities of worker, student, and other popular organizations. Remember

that you are not the protecting force of the oligarchy's and Yankee's interests. On the contrary, you are a soldier of your Fatherland and you swore to defend it with your life if necessary!"

While we cannot vouch for the authenticity of the Gaitán message, several Panamanian officials assert that there is a growing guerrilla movement in Panama. Such a development, if true, would pose a dicey situation for U.S. forces in Panama.

For one thing, on U.S. orders, the government of Guillermo "Porky" Endara has done away with any armed forces, and is totally dependent on U.S. troops for its security. The Endara government has little or no popular support. On Dec. 20, the first anniversary of the 1989 U.S. invasion, a crowd estimated by the international press at more than 120,000 marched against the government and the continued U.S. occupation. The massive demonstration took place just days after the government had illegally ordered the dismissal from their jobs of hundreds of labor leaders for organizing an earlier protest march on Dec. 4, in which an estimated 100,000 participated.

Furthermore, Gaitán has already proven himself a formidable opponent. During the 1989 invasion, while George Bush was crowing that the PDF had folded without a fight and that everything was over but the shouting, Gaitán led what the media described as a "daring" daylight attack on U.S. military headquarters in Panama on Dec. 22, forcing "U.S.

military officers to huddle under the tables with reporters."

When armed resistance was no longer possible, he obtained diplomatic asylum with Noriega at the Vatican Embassy in Panama, where he remained for more than nine months.

This past Sept. 16, Gaitán quietly abandoned the Papal legation, causing the U.S. Southern Command to launch a massive manhunt "by land, by air, and by sea," as was reported in the Sept. 28 *EIR*.

The unsuccessful search for Gaitán extended to all of Ibero-America. On Oct. 16, the Argentine daily *Clarín* reported that Gaitán was the "most sought-after foreigner" in all of Argentina, where he was believed to have been given refuge by his mentor, Argentine nationalist leader Mohamed Alí Seineldín. Other reports placed him in Nicaragua, Peru, or Colombia, or even as far away as Libya.

New York Newsday, which often serves as a leak sheet for U.S. intelligence, said in an article on Nov. 14 that the U.S. military feared that "the aggressive, hot-headed and decisive" Gaitán is "a cunning, ruthless soldier more than capable of igniting an insurgency in Panama." According to the report, U.S. intelligence failed to detect that Gaitán was in charge of the PDF's Special Operations Command at the time of the invasion.

Gaitán's troops received training from Israel, Libya, Cuba, and from the Argentine Colonel Seineldín, whose "ultra-rightwing philosophy" he shares, according to U.S. intelligence sources cited by *Newsday*. According to the reports, U.S. intelligence fear that these "elite soldiers" represent a "considerable possibility of future instability" for Panama and are capable of "destabilizing" the country.