

Salinas-Bush cartel under attack in Mexico

by Hugo López Ochoa

The Feb. 18 arrest of narco-Gen. Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, and his dismissal as director of Mexico's National Institute to Combat Drugs (INCD), on charges of protecting Juárez drug cartel boss Amado Carrillo Fuentes (a.k.a. "Lord of the Skies"), is the opening move of a bold counterattack by Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo and the Mexican Army against the machinery of former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Although out of power and living in self-imposed exile in Ireland, Salinas still controls a powerful and corrupt political machine inside Mexico, under the protection of his political godfather, former U.S. President and cocaine kingpin, George Bush.

The Anglo-American media, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Washington "analysts," and a handful of U.S. congressmen, have promoted a contrary view of this breakthrough, demanding that Washington decertify Mexico come March 1, citing this as "proof" that high-level corruption exists within the Mexican government and Armed Forces. What they don't say, of course, is that the drug cartels reached the height of their power inside both the United States and Mexico, through the Presidencies of George Bush and his protégé, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Bush and Salinas had used the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a means of shattering Mexico's economic sovereignty and turning it into a narco-economy. And now, on the eve of President Clinton's visit to Mexico in mid-April, the Bush-Salinas political apparatus is being deployed to sabotage any possibility of U.S.-Mexico cooperation.

The story behind Gutiérrez Rebollo's exposure is not that the apple has worms, but that Mexico's national institutions have finally begun to root out those worms, and to defend the existence of the nation-state against efforts by the Bush-Salinas crowd to turn Mexico into a no-man's land of drug traffickers and terrorists.

Profile: Gutiérrez Rebollo

General Gutiérrez Rebollo won fame as a "hard-liner" against the drug traffickers during the past 10 years or so, while serving as military commander in Sinaloa (a post covering Mexico's entire northwest, including Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa) and as commander of the Fifth Military Region, headquartered in Guadalajara, Jalisco. Among the more notorious drug lords captured on his watch were Héctor "Güero" Palma, Eduardo Salazar Carrillo, Jorge Iván Taborda, and others. But, "while he may have acted effectively against some groups of drug traffickers, we now feel that he also wittingly and primarily served the interests and the strengthening of another group," i.e., Amado Carrillo's, declared Defense Secretary Gen. Enrique Cervantes Aguirre, during a Feb. 18 press conference. It was at this press conference, given before all the commanders of the Mexican Army and officials of the Attorney General's office, that it was announced that General Gutiérrez Rebollo had been placed in the hands of civil authorities for trial, to then be followed by military judicial proceedings.

The question, of course, is how did Gutiérrez Rebollo come to be named the anti-drug chief of Mexico, in November 1996, only to be fired barely three months later? Both Defense Secretary Cervantes Aguirre, and President Zedillo himself, have admitted to the disgrace of having placed a traitor to the nation in such a post. But this was not just a failure of Mexican military intelligence. White House anti-drug director Gen. Barry McCaffrey expressed his own outrage that, despite reports that information on Gutiérrez Rebollo had been provided to Mexican authorities by U.S. agencies, he himself had never been informed! During a recent visit to Washington by Gutiérrez Rebollo and Attorney General Madrazo, McCaffrey had outdone himself in praise for the new INCD director.

Gutiérrez Rebollo became INCD director as part of a ma-

neuver by the Salinas political machine in November 1996 to exonerate the former President's brother Raúl Salinas, who has been in jail since February 1995 on charges of assassinating PRI Secretary General José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, as well as on charges of money laundering in Switzerland and other countries, tax evasion, and illicit enrichment.

First, a trap was laid for then Attorney General Jorge Lozano Gracia, in late November 1996. Lozano was led to believe, through Raúl Salinas's private "astrologer," known as "La Paca," that human bones "found" on a ranch belonging to Raúl Salinas were of Manuel Muñoz Rocha, one of Salinas's alleged accomplices in the Ruiz Massieu murder, who had disappeared in September 1995. When the bones were determined by forensic scientists not to belong to Muñoz Rocha, Attorney General Lozano became a laughingstock. President Zedillo had to dismiss him.

The scandal was a hard blow to Zedillo, who had nominated Lozano, a member of the opposition National Action Party, as a guarantee of impartiality in ongoing investigations of three major assassinations: Guadalajara Archbishop Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, and the Presidential candidate of the ruling PRI party, Luis Donaldo Colosio. Taking advantage of the temporary demoralization inside the Zedillo government, the Salinas machine was able to impose as Lozano's replacement Jorge Madrazo, a prominent member of the mafia of homosexuals controlled by Jorge Carpizo, the powerful former Attorney General and former Interior Minister under Carlos Salinas. Along with Madrazo came Gutiérrez Rebollo as the new director of INCD, which is a dependency of the Attorney General's office.

Following this Salinas "coup," the Mexican media began to openly speculate about how long it would be before Raúl Salinas was freed from jail.

The fallout against Mexico's institutions from the ongoing scandals, is reflected in the disproportionately low percentages the PRI is receiving in the polls, as mid-term federal elections are readied for July. Those elections include, for the first time, the governorship of the Federal District, where 20% of Mexico's population lives. The PRI has received less than 20% in the polls, against more than 30% for the opposition PAN and more than 20% for the opposition PRD.

Zedillo readies a counterattack

The arrest of Gutiérrez Rebollo comes as the first of what President Zedillo promised in a February television interview would be "unprecedented measures" to root out corruption. Purges have already begun of corrupt elements within the INCD, and names of other prominent individuals have begun to surface in connection to Raúl Salinas's narco-activities. For example, the Mexican media have given prominent play to reports first published in the *New York Times* that two sitting Mexican governors, including Manlio Fabio Beltrones of Sonora, are tied into Raúl Salinas's drug-trafficking protection racket. Although this news service reserves judgment about the *Times*'s motives in publishing its exposé—which may well

be related to its long-standing project of destabilizing Mexico's institutions—the fact is that the charges against Beltrones, in particular, are highly credible. In fact, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Robert Gelbard, told a Congressional hearing on Feb. 25, "We have concerns about Governor Beltrones. And we're studying that, we're continuing to study that."

Several Mexican journalists have also usefully identified specific aspects of the Bush-Salinas machine arrayed against Mexico.

El Financiero columnist Jorge Fernández Menéndez, for example, wrote Feb. 25 that complicity between public security agencies and drug traffickers was solidified following the explosion of cocaine consumption in the United States, which followed the Presidential decision to provide weapons to the Nicaraguan Contras, a decision approved by Reagan, but willfully carried out by Vice President George Bush. "The contact of the Contras in Honduras was drug trafficker [Ramón] Matta Ballesteros, a Medellín Cartel man. The direct boss of Matta Ballesteros in Mexico was Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo and his main operator, Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo (Don Neto). Working under the latter was Rafael Caro Quintero and a nephew of Don Neto, who at the time only carried out minor tasks: Amado Carrillo Fuentes. This group was in charge of transporting weapons to Honduras, and in exchange returned to Mexico with cocaine and crack to bring into the U.S. So close was the relationship that the Jalisco ranches owned by Caro Quintero were used for training the Contras."

"Such was the degree of complexity in relations maintained by this group of drug traffickers with the powers and with the CIA, that at least two deaths are directly attributable to having discovered these links: that of journalist Manuel Buendía, on May 30, 1984, and that of [U.S.] DEA agent Enrique Camarena one year later.

"In 1989, George Bush was President of the United States. . . . At the time, Amado Carrillo was arrested in Guadalajara, and then released weeks later. From that moment onward, he was in charge of rebuilding the network of political contacts and of drug traffickers. The jewel in the crown was named Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, who at the time was charged with destroying the cartels of the adversaries of that youth, who later would come to be known as 'Lord of the Skies.' "

José Neme Salum, another prominent Mexican columnist, wrote in *Excelsior* of Feb. 24, that "behind the treason committed by Gen. Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo is the whole apparatus of an explicit policy, formulated and launched by George Bush since he was vice president of the United States, to use not only the state apparatus of that country, but of a large number of nations in Latin America, Asia, and Europe, on behalf of the drug trade." The strategy to dismantle the Salinas machinery has failed, says Neme Salum, because it clashed with "that association established by Bush."

Neme concludes that President Zedillo should resolve with President Clinton to undertake "a joint investigation that would permit the dismemberment of the Bush cartel."