

The Spadafora case: Soviets try to disrupt the Panama Canal

by Gretchen Small

The U.S. Congress has ordered that taxpayers' money be used to finance the deployment of U.S. intelligence capabilities on behalf of a Soviet-directed operation to disrupt functioning of the Panama Canal.

On Sept. 24, the Senate passed an amendment requiring the Central Intelligence Agency to investigate the alleged involvement of Panama's Defense Forces in "drug-running, arms trafficking, and the murder of a political dissident." The amendment, sponsored by North Carolina's Sen. Jesse Helms (R), was attached as a rider to the bill authorizing next year's funding for U.S. intelligence. The following week, the House of Representatives softened the amendment to state that Congress expects CIA head William Casey to bring any CIA results before congressional intelligence committees.

Who's covering up what?

The assassinated "political dissident" whose cause Congress has adopted is **Hugo Spadafora**, a Panamanian terrorist gun-runner whose decapitated body was found in a U.S. mailbag on Sept. 14, 1985, on the Costa Rican side of the Paso Canoas River, which divides Costa Rica and Panama.

Since that moment, Panamanian assets of the drug trade, centered around Roberto Eisenmann's newspaper, *La Prensa*, have insisted that Spadafora was killed by the Defense Forces, on orders of its Commander, Gen. Manuel Noriega, in order to silence Spadafora's denunciations of corruption inside the Defense Forces.

To present Spadafora as a "whistle-blower" on corruption, is itself ludicrous. The man's business was trafficking in arms and drugs.

Furthermore, evidence just published in Panama documents that Spadafora's double-crossing had given at least five armed groups in Central America reason enough to seek revenge. These stunning revelations add new evidence to the conclusions of *EIR*'s White Paper on Panama, released last spring, which documented that the source of the charges of drug and arms trafficking against Panama's Defense Forces is *the drug lobby itself*.

In a special 20-page supplement in early September, Panama's largest-circulation daily, *La Crítica*, published facsimiles of handwritten letters from Spadafora and former

associates, and reprints of articles, which warned that he was being hunted. Names, dates, and places of Spadafora's activities are provided, including never-before-published proof that Spadafora worked with South American narcotics kings.

Why has investigation into these leads been blocked, and attention paid only to the alleged role of Panama's Defense Forces? At the time of his death, Spadafora was up to his neck with the Nicaraguan "contras," and in contact with U.S. intelligence agents who "advise" the contra operation. The following summary of Spadafora's enemies, as reported in *La Crítica*, raises the question: Has the cover-up occurred in Washington, D.C., not Panama?

Double-crossed by Spadafora: the list

The Somocistas: The first documented hit order against Spadafora came from Nicaragua's former dictator, Gen. Anastasio Somoza, reported in the pages of the Central American magazine *Mas*, in December 1978. Spadafora was fighting on the side of the Sandinistas against Somoza, when Somoza gave orders to the National Guard for Spadafora to be decapitated, and his "body thrown in the Paso Canoas River." Somoza then put out the word that he had placed \$10,000 in a foreign bank account, for the person who turned in Spadafora's head.

True, Somoza died before Spadafora. But many of Somoza's old buddies did not. Is the similarity between how Spadafora was ultimately found, and Somoza's order, mere coincidence?

Muammar Qaddafi: After the Sandinistas won, Spadafora went on to bigger adventures. In 1980, he traveled to Libya, where he presented Libyan madman Qaddafi's Latin American and International Affairs chiefs with a plan to form a new "revolutionary international brigade," to fight in Guatemala and El Salvador. Qaddafi handed Spadafora \$4 million, and reportedly agreed to send arms and military equipment, via Surinam and Belize.

The Guatemalan and Salvadoran terrorists did not trust Spadafora, and refused his aid. The arms shipments stayed in the hands of intermediaries, but the Libyans never received an accounting of the money. Spadafora would do anything but return the money, *La Crítica* reports, even attempting to

gain protection against Qaddafi's collection efforts, by contacting Israeli intelligence agent, Oren Nathaniel Yechivi Calderón.

Eden Pastora's ARDE: Soon, Spadafora joined with Eden Pastora, to found the first "contra" contingent against the government both had helped bring to power. Spadafora was assigned the job of securing arms and supplies from businessmen, governments, and intelligence agents. His travels in this job took him from Honduras to El Salvador, the United States, Guyana, and, yes, Cuba.

But by 1984, members of Pastora's Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE) denounced Spadafora for stealing funds, endangering military operations, and selling weapons to the contras at inflated prices. Spadafora was soon expelled from ARDE. After an assassination attempt against him, Pastora published an open letter, insinuating that Spadafora had helped set him up.

A month before his death, Spadafora wrote to Miskito leader Brooklyn Rivera: "Pastora's resentments have led him to go beyond the limit of simply questioning my criteria . . . he intends an attempt against my life. . . . People in a position to know . . . have informed me that in his craziness and his desire to silence my criticisms, Eden has given criminal orders to some of his most intimate collaborators, to assassinate me." On Aug. 27, Spadafora wrote in his personal diary, "The latest information which the 'ticos' [Costa Ricans] have passed me is worrisome. They say members of ARDE, surely sent by Eden, are following me. . . ."

Miskito contras: After leaving ARDE, Spadafora joined another faction of the contras, the Miskito Indian fighters under the leadership of Brooklyn Rivera. (To sort out on whose "side" Rivera actually fights is a tale in itself, too complicated for this article.) charge of weapons acquisitions. He also finally gained the confidence of U.S. intelligence agents coordinating ex-Somocista contra forces, because he had broken with Pastora. The Honduran-based contras, however, soon accused Spadafora of stealing a shipment of arms and munitions. He misrepresented himself to CIA agents handling it, as the Contrás' weapons agent, but never turned over the goods.

The drug mob: At the same time, Spadafora entered the drug traffic in a big way, *La Crítica* reports. He established "mutual assistance agreements" with leading Colombian and Bolivian drug-traffickers, to cooperate on arms-for-drugs deals. Costa Rica became the center of this activity for him, where he helped on several clandestine airstrips, where drug planes could land. "Apparently, such activities counted on the aid of some influential officials in Costa Rica, including agents of the U. S. CIA and FBI," *La Crítica* states. "It was public and notorious that Spadafora held meetings in restaurants and other places with known drug and arms traffickers, without the Costa Rican authorities doing anything to stop it."

He traveled frequently in Costa Rica, for example, with

a Panamanian pilot, recently executed in Colombia by the drug-mob for failing to deliver a cocaine shipment, *La Crítica* reports. The pilot, Cesar Rodríguez, was known as "Captain Poison" and "Lavamático," for his exploits. Alberto Aude-mar, an arms agent for Colombian terrorists and drug mafiosi, was another of Spadafora's business partners. The two landed arms and drugs on the beaches of San Lorenzo, Chiriqui, in Panama.

Does Helms 'work for Russians'?

After reviewing the career of this so-called political dissident, *La Crítica* asked: Is Jesse Helms working for the Russians? Helms "has come to believe that he has the right to insult, accuse, and challenge, any Latin American dignitary," *La Crítica* wrote. "What he has achieved with this is to turn not only Panama into an enemy, but also Mexico, Honduras, etc. . . . Could it be perhaps, that this man who calls himself an ultra-right-winger works undercover for the Russians, and uses these methods to destabilize Brown America?"

If the Russians control Helms, the key is his foreign-policy adviser, Jon Speller. Speller, a second-generation agent of the Trust—the partnership of Western and Russian oligarchic interests that brought the Bolsheviks to power and directs the Soviet dictatorship today—still brags that he is a protégé of Sergius Riis, a high-ranking member of the early Bolshevik secret police. (See *EIR's* book, *Derivative Assassination*.)

Speller credits Riis as the source of his knowledge of Panama, in a 1972 book, *The Panama Canal: Heart of America's Security*, where Speller argues that the United States must ensure that no second sea-level canal is ever built in Panama. Every conceivable argument is thrown against the idea of a new canal—from supposed ecological damage, to the "danger" that a new canal would require a new treaty, and thus open the way to Panamanian sovereignty.

Speller's opposition to the construction of a new canal capable of handling today's largest sea-going vessels, matches Soviet strategic concerns. In March 1986, the Soviets attacked the construction of a sea-level canal as a project which would only benefit "U.S. militarism." *America Latina*, published by the Latin American Institute of the U. S. S. R.'s Academy of Sciences, blasted the Japanese government for working with Panama on the project, "pompously called the greatest in this century."

In Panama, however, the sea-level canal plan has received renewed attention, as the path to bringing the nation into the 21st century, as an industrialized, stable nation. But if Helms's campaign to dismantle Panama's military succeeds, Panamanian officials warn, the resulting chaos will not only bury the second canal project, but make the current canal indefensible.

Is the agreement between Helms, Speller, and the Soviets, mere coincidence?