

## Dateline Mexico by Carlos Valdez

### *The reconquista of Sinaloa*

*Mexican military nationalists are liquidating the private armies of Sinaloa's narcotics traffickers to disarm the PAN party.*

**T**he Mexican army is sending reinforcements to the state of Sinaloa to recapture it from the hands of Dope, Inc. before January.

Sinaloa, on the Pacific Coast above Acapulco, is one of the most developed of Mexico's agricultural regions. It is also the most violent part of the country, with a drug trafficking tradition going back decades, when Mazatlán was a main entry port for Chinese opium on its way to Bugsy Siegel's Los Angeles.

The Sinaloa mafia was severely repressed by "Operation Condor," during the Echeverría and López Portillo governments. But, during the past four years, under poverty conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund and restraints put on nationalist anti-drug factions of the military, the state became a drug cesspool. The killers of DEA agent Enrique Camarena not only used a Mazatlan hotel as a safehouse, they owned it.

The Mexican government began the *reconquista* by transferring Gen. Rodolfo Reta Trigos to Sinaloa. Reta served as chief of staff of the Mexican Army during the six-year presidency of José López Portillo (1976-82). He graduated general staff courses inside and outside of Mexico. Until Nov. 12, he commanded the Tenth Military Zone in the state of Durango. During Reta's tour of duty in Durango, that state ceased to be Mexico's second-largest producer of drugs. With his transfer to Sinaloa, he becomes the head of the Third Military Region, which commands Durango, Chihu-

ahua, and Sonora as well as Sinaloa. This area is the heartland of Mexico's narcotics traffic.

On Dec. 1, Reta organized a military parade in Mazatlán, to show that law and order had returned. He warned at the ceremony, "We don't want the drug traffickers here, because that is the will of the community. If they are smart, they'll leave and stop sowing drugs which are only poisoning our youth, the most sacred [part] of society."

On Nov. 29, Reta had returned from Mexico City where he arranged with Defense Secretary Juan Arevalo Gardoqui for "an unprecedented battle plan against narcotics traffic." Trustworthy army units will be brought in to help the campaign. Reta announced that a special magistrate and a prosecutor would be deployed to investigate all complaints of "abuses by the troops in the mountainous region." Reta warned that the Army would not only arrest the peasants who grow narcotics. "We will also come down on the heads of narcotics traffic, on those who are behind them." He promised to "bring back to Sinaloa the peace which it needs and has lost." Soldiers will follow up every report of shoot-outs or machine-gun fire. "We will not allow nincompoops who freely shoot their guns in the streets of the city." He pledged to disarm the "influentials" allied to departing governor Antonio Toledo Corro and their corrupt policemen.

Political circles view General Reta's reassignment as the minimum ac-

tion required to guarantee a smooth inauguration for governor-elect Francisco Labastida Ochoa. Labastida left a cabinet position as energy minister to clean up Sinaloa. His campaign focused on the fight against narcotics traffic. In the election campaign, he defeated a man who might be the financial chief of drug traffic in the state, Manuel J. Clouthier. (Clouthier's warehouse was found packed full of marijuana in 1973.)

Clouthier was fielded by the National Action Party, PAN, known as "Moscow's terrorists in Mexico." The PAN could be expected to seize and burn city halls in Sinaloa as the inauguration of victorious PRI candidates take place in the first days of January. The deployment of the savvy Reta with extra troops should prevent PAN from wielding the private armies of the narcotics traffickers against Mexico.

Labastida said on Nov. 11, "We are in head-on combat against the neofascism which threatens the social stability of our state." The battle is against "those willing to bring Sinaloa to the brink of violence in their lust to seize power."

It is interesting for Mexico-watchers to note that when General Reta was leaving Durango, the new governor, a man from the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), was effusive in praise of what had been accomplished and promised he would continue Reta's work against narcotics traffic. After his arrival in Sinaloa, the first—and the only—public declaration of support came from the CTM by means of Sen. Juan Sigfrido Millan Lizarraga. He declared that the Mexican Army's battle against narcotics traffic and illegal possession of arms had "the complete support of all the citizens and of the worker sector." That was the answer to Reta's exhortation for "all civil organizations to participate in this campaign."