

# Shultz scheme a dud in Central America

by Gretchen Small

Once again, the U.S. Establishment has decided that a Central American war is the quickest route to success, in its desperate drive to blow up the potential for a united Ibero-American defense against the global deal that the Establishment has struck with the Soviet imperialists.

What else could account for the bizarre agenda adopted by Secretary of State George Shultz during his Aug. 1-10 grandstand tour of Central and South America? From Guatemala City to Buenos Aires, Shultz told national leaders that they had better back U.S. plans to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua—or else. In the middle of the worst debt crisis in Ibero-America in six years, Shultz's insistence that overthrowing the Sandinistas is the key to solving the region's problems, borders on the absurd.

By the time he reached Uruguay on Aug. 4, Shultz declared that except for Nicaragua (which he called "a cancer" which the U.S. will "do everything we can to stop from growing"), "as far as Central America is concerned, the policies of the United States are strong and basically successful." Perhaps the first time U.S. policy toward Central America has been declared "successful" in any respect. Shultz asserted that the Central American democracies "are experiencing real growth in their economies," a remarkable description indeed of the starvation, drugs, and terrorism that Central America's governments are battling.

For eight years, the Sandinista bullies have provided the Reagan administration with a useful foil for the United States' failure to adopt even the semblance of a strategy of aid to allies in the region to defend themselves from Soviet irregular warfare. While Washington scuttlebutt is that President Reagan is toying with the idea of a late-hour war against Nicaragua, Shultz's renewed attacks on Nicaragua have another aim.

Nicaragua is not what worries the U.S. Establishment today, but rather Panama. Panama's gritty refusal to submit to the U.S.-Soviet condominium has set off the biggest explosion of nationalist resistance in Ibero-America against international financial cartels since the 1950s. Any dramatic show of force being prepared against Nicaragua today, seeks to provide cover for military action against the nation both Moscow and Washington have been unable to subdue: Panama.

"Shultz is making a last stand to get rid of Panama strongman Manuel Noriega, who has proved to be as intractable as a tick on a dog," Jack Anderson noted in his Aug. 9 column, published in the Caracas *Daily Journal*. "In spite of the setbacks, Shultz is determined—even more determined than the President—to oust Noriega. The secretary of state was a key player behind the covert action finding that Reagan secretly signed last month bolstering opposition to Noriega . . . a mild sop to Shultz, who refused to relent."

## Democratic bullying

"Relentless" Shultz was on the defensive from the get-go. He has no military or economic aid to offer Ibero-America, an official responsible for much of State Department Americas policy told the press in a background briefing before Shultz left. He will tell them that free trade is the only way they can solve their economic problems, and then return to the question of restoring "democracy" to Panama and Nicaragua. When asked if the Reagan administration plans to help Bolivia with increased military aid to fight the drug mafia, the State Department official snapped, "You know we don't go around with suitcases filled with security assistance."

Indeed, State Department spokesman Phyllis Oakley had cautioned reporters just a few days before, that reports of U.S. discussions with Peru on new military agreements to replace Peru's dependence on Russian military equipment, were exaggerated. U.S. military aid to Peru totals \$400,000 this year, and is limited to training programs, Oakley stated.

This, from this same State Department crew that demands incessantly that the Congress fork over *millions* to prop up the Nicaraguan Contras—a drug-running mercenary army whose operations for years have provided the Sandinistas with their biggest domestic support!

## A matter of sovereignty

Shultz's first stop, Guatemala City, was planned to give the secretary of state the ammunition he needed to get the South American nations to line up behind the new anti-Nicaragua blitz. Here, a meeting was set with the foreign ministers of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica, out of which Shultz hoped to form a new U.S.-Central American consultative mechanism which would end the Central American initiative known as Esquipulas II, launched in 1987 by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias.

The Central American initiative was never based on a strategy which could seriously take on the region's problems, except in one feature: its statement that Central Americans should take the lead in resolving the problems of Central America, and not some East-West condominium. That simple statement of sovereignty, is what Shultz's "consultative mechanism" sought to eliminate.

If the Central Americans agreed to that, then the Contadora and Support Group, Ibero-America's first step to form-

ing an independent diplomatic group, would, de facto, be ruled out of the Central American equation.

Shultz had sent down Special Ambassador to Central America Morris Busby, as an advance envoy, with instructions to get the Central Americans behind the plan. Busby offered everything from money to threats. His bullying provoked an angry backlash from Central American leaders who disliked being ordered around like the proverbial banana republic.

When he landed in Guatemala, Shultz was greeted by a full-page advertisement taken out by the ruling Christian Democratic Party. It denounced "growing pressures exercised in recent days by representatives of the U.S. government on the highest authorities of our government," including "veiled threats of economic reprisals aimed at forcing our country to join a common front to isolate and condemn Nicaragua."

Edmond Mulet, vice president of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Guatemala's Congress, named Ambassador Busby as the official who had threatened Guatemala one week before. Busby had brought a draft document with him which he demanded all the foreign ministers sign, Mulet said. If they signed, he promised the U.S. would pay part of the Guatemalan foreign debt, stabilize its currency, and give the Guatemalan military spare parts and more training.

Guatemalan officials told Busby his document was "a virtual declaration of war by the Central American countries against Nicaragua," and they would not sign unless it were modified. Then Busby threatened that "if Guatemala did not sign it, just as he had presented it, the consequences would not be good for the country," Mulet charged.

Busby's warnings hark back to Adm. John Poindexter's now-famous December 1985 warning to Panama's Gen. Manuel Noriega, that he would "pay the consequences" for refusing to allow Panama to be used as a staging base for a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua.

Costa Rica also refused to sign the Shultz-Busby document, charging that to do so, would be to hand over to Washington the right to decide Central America's future. "If we sign this statement . . . we would be losing our independence," a Costa Rican official exclaimed. Honduras and El Salvador sided with Shultz in the dispute, but El Salvador's Foreign Minister Ricardo Acevedo had no qualms in admitting why: We're interested in signing "in order to receive substantial economic aid," he told one news service.

Shultz was forced to accept a modified document, which set up no consultative mechanisms, and granted no special rights to the United States to decide policy.

Signs that Guatemala is already beginning to feel "the consequences" Busby threatened have already appeared. A new plot for a military coup was uncovered on Aug. 5. Guatemala also faces tough wrangling with the International Monetary Fund, which is demanding austerity measures guaranteed to make the government very unpopular.

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