

# Panama warns of U.S. military intervention

by Carlos Wesley

Panama's President Manuel Solís Palma has warned that the Reagan administration may be preparing a military intervention against his country. In an interview with Reuters wire service Aug. 29, Solís referred to a visit to the United States by his ousted predecessor, Eric Delvalle: "We think it could be related to plans for new agitation in Panama, with the campaign that Col. Eduardo Herrera is running for military intervention in Panama with the open help of the United States."

Colonel Herrera, Panama's former ambassador to Israel, was cashiered from the Panamanian Defense Forces when it was discovered that he was working with "Project Democracy" forces in the United States to oust PDF Commander Gen. Manuel Noriega. He is currently engaged in efforts to create a paramilitary force, modeled on the Nicaraguan "Contra" operation, to invade Panama, reportedly from neighboring Costa Rica.

There are mounting signs that the Project Democracy gang that runs U.S. foreign policy is attempting to "create a fictitious theater of war" in Panama, charged the PDF's Lt. Col. Aquilino Sieiro at a press conference Aug. 26. Sieiro said that the previous night two U.S. Black Hawk helicopters had circled near Omar Torrijos International Airport, endangering civilian air traffic for several hours.

U.S. media are beating the drums for an "October surprise" military action against Panama. On Aug. 29, the *Washington Times* carried a commentary by B.J. Cutler, director of the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain, which proposed that the United States evacuate all dependents of American military, embassy, and Panama Canal employees, "as a message to Noriega that if he continues his outrageous behavior, President Reagan may consider military action, which is more thinkable if wives and children are not at risk."

The justification for such an evacuation, said Cutler, was a pattern of increased harassment of U.S. personnel in Panama, including rapes and muggings carried out under Noriega's orders. The charges had all the earmarks of a dirty operation by Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Elliott Abrams, to fuel U.S.-Panama hostility. The same unsupported accusations had been bandied about earlier by the media, citing the proverbial unnamed "senior administration official."

This, despite strong denials from both the PDF and the

U.S. military forces in Panama. "We do not feel that this is an orchestrated campaign. . . . This isn't the wild, wild West," said a spokesman for the Panama-based U.S. Southern Command. The American military officials said that Washington had overstated the severity of the alleged harassment, and challenged the State Department's report that it was part of a Panamanian drive to impede normal operations or to undermine U.S. military morale.

The charges, noted a statement issued by the PDF on Aug. 21, "are reckless, irresponsible, and dangerous." As for the "senior administration official," the statement said that he or she "must have the I.Q. of a three-year-old Neanderthal" to claim that the alleged harassment was intended to pressure Washington to lift economic sanctions. "It is obvious that this would not be an intelligent attitude on the part of Panama to convince the U.S. to lift the sanctions," said the statement.

## Psywar campaign crumbles

The State Department has launched a new spate of psychological warfare operations to prepare for the "October surprise" military action against Panama. On Aug. 28, the turncoats whom Abrams calls "Panama's embassy in Washington" claimed that Noriega was building up Panamanian military strength with Soviet, Cuban, and Nicaraguan help. This, they said, "represents a direct threat not only to Panamanians fighting for democracy, but to all the region and to relations between Panama and the United States."

After more than two years of this type of disinformation, it is unlikely that the latest charges will prove any more successful in removing Noriega from power, than the six-month freeze of Panamanian funds in the United States. Panamanian Foreign Minister Jorge Ritter has charged that more than \$50 million of Panama's money frozen in U.S. banks is being used to finance the "Contra" operation, and to pay the bills of those associated with former President Delvalle.

There are signs that the centerpiece of Abrams's psywar campaign against Noriega—that he is a drug trafficker—is crumbling. Panama's Defense Forces participated in a 30-nation campaign against drugs, sponsored by the International Drug Enforcement Conference (IDEC), which was praised by U.S. Attorney General Richard Thornburgh as a "milestone" in the war on drugs. The State Department's own semi-annual report to Congress on Foreign Narcotics Corruption, issued at the end of August, omitted Panama as a nation whose leaders are involved in drug trafficking.

At a press conference held in Bogotá, Colombia after an IDEC meeting, Panamanian representative Col. Nivaldo Madriñán said that the charges against Noriega "were part of a slander campaign by the U.S." and added that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration had no evidence linking Noriega to drug trafficking. Sitting next to Madriñán was IDEC chairman John Lawn, who is also the head of the DEA. Lawn made no objection to Madriñán's comments.