

## World press reports: Bush in trouble now

*Commentary in the international press on the U.S. invasion of Panama has been highly critical, including from many sources not normally prone to such views of Washington's policies. We highlight here some examples that point to the backfire potential against President Bush.*

### France

*Le Figaro*, Dec. 26:

Contrary to U.S. government estimations, the military action in Panama has been a disaster, the major French daily's special correspondent comments. The "once agreeable and friendly" Panama City is now "devastated" and is reminiscent of Beirut; the presidential quarters and Supreme Court are in ruins. The situation "reminds one of Apocalypse Now," while the U.S. public has seen nothing of what is really happening, because of censorship. The U.S. military command has expelled journalists, and seized their film. "The Pentagon presents it all as a clean operation, like in a Hollywood film," he reports.

### Great Britain

*Financial Times*, Dec. 21:

The daily describes as "disturbing" the U.S. Department of Justice authorization for overseas arrests of "those declared fugitives from U.S. law."

Did the goal of removing General Noriega "warrant the extreme recourse of an invasion of the sovereign territory of another country," the *Times's* editorial asks. Even if one doesn't like Noriega, "his place in the indisputable first division of villainy is borderline. It would be hard to sustain the case that his crimes against humanity were worse than, for example, those of Pol Pot, who was removed by a Vietnamese invasion that the U.S., among others, so vehemently condemned; or indeed of the Ceausescu dynasty in Romania, which appears to have killed in a weekend more than Noriega has in years. In so determining, the U.S. has set itself up as judge, jury, and, if necessary, executioner—a course not without consequences and responsibilities."

Leaders in Mexico and further south are now fearful that the U.S. will invoke the narcotics issue as "a pretext" for further armed interventions, the editorial notes. And "the management of Panama may prove as troublesome as the taking of it," especially as U.S. actions over the past period have, perhaps irrevocably, destroyed the Panamanian economy.

*Financial Times*, Dec. 27:

One of the "most disturbing" aspects of the U.S. invasion of Panama, is the effort of the U.S. Armed Forces to control the flow of all information, placing every imaginable obstacle in the way of journalists' coverage of the events independent of the reports coming from the U.S. invasion army, the *Times* special correspondent in Panama writes. Many press were held "virtually as prisoners" on a U.S. military installation for 36 hours, given hardly any food and hardly any access to phones. Official numbers of U.S. casualty figures can be "seriously questioned," while the U.S. command is effectively preventing accurate accounts of civilian casualties, he charges.

"Torrijos must be turning in his grave," the *Times* comments, referring to the late Panamanian nationalist leader. The irony of the U.S. invasion is that it might spark a revival of Torrijos's original political coalition and ideas. U.S.-installed President Guillermo Endara is seen by the Panamanian black and mixed-skin population as the head of a "rabi-blanco" government of "white oligarchs." And since whatever U.S. aid comes in will be filtered through "free market" channels, the poorer populations might again rally behind a Torrijos-like appeal to "health, education, and housing."

This trend will be further catalyzed by the country's devastation by bombing, looting, anarchy, and chaos. There is a serious shortage of food and medicine throughout Panama City, and long food queues. This dire condition of Panamanians contrasts with the "relative luxury of U.S. troops" who have invaded, the *Times* notes:

*Guardian*, Dec. 28:

"Whilst the earthquakes of freedom grow ever more thunderous across Eastern Europe, all the President of the United States has to occupy his time is a tedious and embarrassing wrangle with the Pope about the fate of General Noriega. And, so far, the Pope commands the high ground," the paper comments. "America's botched adventure. . . a week on, has cost many innocent lives, turned much of Panama into a looted shambles, installed a leader seemingly incapable of independent leadership, doomed Washington to bail out an enfeebled client for years to come—and left Manuel Noriega, of all people, sheltering beneath the Vatican's robes. It is something short of triumph; and, as Mr. Bush retires to catch easier fish, there is an appropriate political cost attached."

### Italy

*Avvenire*, Dec. 21:

"The U.S. bombs against Noriega are the first effect of the U.S.-Soviet Détente," the newspaper of the Italian Catholic Bishops' Conference asserts. Bush resolved to invade Panama, as a consequence of the agreements taken in Malta with Gorbachov. "What Washington fears most is, as Kissinger said Jan. 8, 1989, the emergence of forces full of 'populism, nationalism, and anti-Americanism.'" But the reality is that the U.S.A. wants to abrogate the 1977 Panama

Canal treaties, the paper concludes.

*Corriere della Sera*, Dec. 21:

"The Shadow of the Old Gendarme," is how the Italian daily of record characterizes the U. S. invasion of Panama. Washington correspondent Brancoli calls the U.S. action "brutal" and "anachronistic." At the moment when the East bloc is moving dramatically towards democracy, the United States is returning to the logic of the gendarme. He anticipates that the U. S. will soon be facing guerrilla war in Panama, and that more and more Americans will be put at risk.

*Il Giornale*, Dec. 21:

"If the attack of 24,000 U. S. soldiers against 6,000 troops of the national guard of Panama leads only to the conquest of a city and not to the capture of a man . . . it will be confirmed that the Americans can take such pirate actions only in the movies. . . . The price Bush will pay will be extremely high. . . . The Soviet Union will be able to appear as the great power which builds peace in Europe, while the American superpower makes acts of war."

*Avvenire*, Dec. 27, "Bush's Obsession":

Elio Maraone writes in a front-page lead commentary, "It is legitimate to have doubts about what were Washington's real intentions. . . . A dead Noriega would have been welcome—even if the White House will never admit it. A living Noriega, free to talk in front of a court, could be quite embarrassing for the CIA, which paid him for years, and for Bush himself, who at that time directed the secret service. Already now some State Department functionaries are trembling, since, as it appears from documents seized in Panama, they were on the payroll of the dictator."

Bush's obsession with Noriega could "push the U. S. President onto the path of authoritarian measures."

## Switzerland

*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Dec. 27, "Troublesome Consequences for Bush":

"U. S. media have called attention to the possibility that in case of a public trial, Noriega may reveal a lot of discrediting material on his former longtime cooperation with the CIA and his personal contacts to leading U. S. representatives.

"According to the *New York Times*, President Bush met with Noriega twice in former years, once in his function as director of the CIA in 1976 and another time as Vice President of the U. S. in 1983."

## United States

*Oakland Tribune*, California, Dec. 21, "Reckless Gamble in Panama":

The editorial opens with a fictitious Soviet TASS wire reporting that Gorbachov has sent Soviet troops into Romania because "Ceausescu has been indicted by world opinion for his crimes. If that seems far-fetched, it's because Gorbachov knows he would pay too high a price in world . . . opinion for violently attacking another nation's sovereignty," but

President Bush has not learned such a lesson.

"[T]he invasion still represents a violation of peace and international order and is a reminder of the lawless days of U. S. intervention in this hemisphere. . . . The outcry will soon find echoes in the United States as well if . . . the operation doesn't end quickly and cleanly. . . . [T]he American people have no stomach either for a prolonged intervention or for the sight of body bags returning in the holiday season. . . . The linchpin assumption behind the whole operation was that Noriega enjoyed no support and the fighting would end soon. . . [F]or many Panamanians, the evil at issue has shifted from Noriega to Yankee intervention—and if they decide to resist, Bush will have gambled away too many lives in vain."

U.S.-installed President Endara lacks credibility, since he was "the corporate attorney for and business partner of a man arrested last April in Georgia for running a huge cocaine conspiracy," the *Tribune* notes.

*New York Post*, column by Pete Hamill, Dec. 26:

"If George Bush really wanted to defend democracy, we would have invaded China after Bush's buddy, Deng Xiaoping, ordered 3,000 young Chinese murdered in Tiananmen Square," rather than sacrificing young Americans in the illegal invasion of Panama. The "whole adventure stinks of hypocrisy." The American soldiers who died in this "senseless melodrama" will be "remembered forever as the young men who died to satisfy the nasty pique and the injured masculinity of an aging President."

Hamill casts doubt on Endara's claim to be the legitimately elected head of Panama, noting that Noriega negated the election in May when it came out, including in the U. S. press, that the U. S. had slipped Endara's campaign \$10 million. "If a foreign nation did that in an American election, we'd probably cancel the counting too; such contributions are illegal here. But the history of our behavior in Latin America is full of doing there what we can't legally do here."

Endara was also close to the "dreadful Arnulfo Arias, an outspoken fascist . . . an admirer of Mussolini," who "ran a racist campaign as the oligarchy's man," Hamill writes. On the drug charges against Noriega, he notes, "For Noriega, you see, there is no presumption of innocence. He's guilty. Bush says so. Cheney says so. The generals say so."

## Germany

*Die Zeit*, Dec. 29:

A front-page editorial comment says of the Panama invasion that this mission in the tradition of Theodore Roosevelt's gunboat diplomacy is more than doubtful: "Field Marshal Bush has either not achieved any of his objectives or only at the cost of immense casualties." The mission was to protect the Canal, which wasn't even threatened at any time; it established firm U. S. control, again, but in a breach of the very same treaty that was to hand over the canal to the Panamanians by the year 2000.