

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

A political Exocet

Mexican presidential hopeful Bartlett may have had his high-flying ambitions shot out from under him.

On May 24, syndicated columnist Jack Anderson published an analysis of the presidential succession fight in Mexico, which suggests that certain intelligence circles—for whatever reasons—fed him some rotten fish for dinner.

Anderson's analysis is based on an alleged CIA report which gives Manuel Bartlett Díaz, currently Mexico's interior ministry, significant chances for becoming the ruling PRI party's candidate for President this fall. According to Anderson's sources, if Bartlett is the next President, there will be "a rosier period in U.S.-Mexican relations."

Anderson was apparently not privy to recent developments here that threaten to prove highly unfavorable for the interior minister's reputation, developments which exploded in a scandal whose impact is comparable to that of an Exocet missile exploding on the bow of the Bartlett campaign ship.

The scandal broke around the publication of an "underground" book about Planning and Budget Minister Salinas de Gortari, also a leading presidential contender. The book is an attack on the minister, proceeding from the claim that at six years of age, Salinas de Gortari accidentally murdered a housemaid with a shotgun.

The book's contents were publicized in various magazines, and circulated clandestinely throughout Mexico City's political circles. Even the national president of the PRI, Jorge

de la Vega, felt obliged to comment on the matter, describing the book as an "execrable" attack on the reputation of a leading public official

Confidential sources indicate that the book also irritated President Miguel de la Madrid. However, the scandal didn't stop there.

The interior ministry began an investigation of the book's publication. One of the two supposed authors, Walter López Koehl, is a reporter for *Por Esto* magazine, run by long-time intelligence agent Mario Menéndez Rodríguez. For this reason, the interior ministry concluded that the book came out of the publishing house of *Por Esto*.

On May 14, several police agents entered the magazine's offices to "investigate" the matter. That same day, an armed confrontation among police agents took place which, according to Menéndez, was prefabricated to try to provoke the workers of *Por Esto* magazine.

On May 15, *Por Esto*'s director met with deputy Interior Minister Jorge Carrillo Olea, in charge of matters related to national security. Also attending the meeting—previously unannounced—was Pedro Vázquez Colmenares, the director general of the National Security Intelligence Service (DISEN).

Menéndez Rodríguez denounced the acts of police "provocation" against the magazine, and said that Walter López had not even been involved in producing the book attacking Salinas

de Gortari. Rather, he charged that the libel had been financed and published on instruction from Interior Minister Manuel Bartlett Díaz, for the purpose of eliminating Salinas de Gortari as a rival for the presidency. He added that one of the presumed authors, José Luis González Meza, worked for Pedro Vázquez Colmenares, the director of the DISEN with links to Bartlett's personal secretary Ruben Guerrero Zorrilla.

Menéndez Rodríguez went ever further. He said that González Meza had given a press conference to national and foreign correspondents to announce the release of his book, and on May 4-6, had visited several national newspapers to distribute the book, guarded at all times by two DISEN agents.

Menéndez's accusations before Carrillo Olea infuriated the DISEN director, who demanded that Menéndez reveal the identity of his sources. The *Por Esto* director replied with a challenge to debate the veracity of his charges before President de la Madrid, which Vázquez Colmenares—again according to Menéndez—not only refused but retaliated with the threat to "begin our investigation with you."

In number 269 of *Por Esto* director Menéndez demanded an investigation of "the links of Vázquez Colmenares and members of his family with the drug trade . . . en Oaxaca." In number 268 of the magazine, Méndez said that the matter "obliges the President of the Republic to conduct a full investigation, which of course cannot be carried out by either the interior ministry—which in our judgment is directly involved in the matter—nor by the defense ministry—because some of its highest officials appear to be committed to the head of Bucareli (the interior ministry—ed.) in the presidential succession."