

Panama vows worldwide fight against U.S. destabilization

by Peter Rush

The U.S. Senate Oct. 6 came very close to passing an amendment bearing on the 1977 Panama Canal Treaties that would contravene international law on non-intervention into the internal affairs of other countries. The amendment, introduced by Sen. Steve Symms (R-Ida.) to a State Department authorization bill, demanded that Panama accept the so-called DeConcini Reservation, passed by the Senate, but not part of the official treaties and never ratified by Panama.

The Reservation gives the United States the permanent right to militarily intervene in Panama, or else abrogate the treaties outright. The amendment lost—after only minimal debate—by the vote of 59-39.

The vote followed by only days the U.S. Senate resolution demanding that the Panamanian government dissolve itself and create a new, “transitional” government within 45 days, or face a cut-off of all U.S. aid and the elimination of Panama’s sugar quota, as well as U.S. imports of some other products.

An international backlash?

The brazenness of the campaign by the U.S. Senate, the administration, the State Department, and its embassy in Panama to overthrow the government of Eric Delvalle now promises to create an international backlash against the United States. At an emergency all-day meeting Oct. 6, the State Council of Panama decided to launch a vigorous international campaign to rally support for Panama against the U.S. destabilization. President Delvalle went on Panamanian television to announce the diplomatic offensive and accuse the United States of waging economic warfare.

The Latin American Parliament has already condemned the U.S. plot, issuing a strongly worded statement Sept. 30 in defense of Panama.

The fundamental issue is international law regarding the inviolable sovereignty of nations, and the prohibition of interference by one nation into the internal affairs of another, principles which the United States nominally adheres to. It is exactly these rights which are being cited daily by the opponents of U.S. assistance to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua,

led by Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), among others. He grants these rights to communist Nicaragua, but not to the democratically elected government of Panama. Dodd is one of the leaders in the campaign to pressure the Panamanian government into overthrowing itself—on the pretext of various discredited charges against Panamanian Defense Forces commander Gen. Manuel Noriega.

The content of the message to be taken by Panama to every government in the world, and to all appropriate international bodies, was outlined by Foreign Minister Jorge Abadía in his Sept. 30 speech to the United Nations (see *Documentation*). Abadía lays out the reason that the Senate and State Department are conducting their illegal campaign to topple his government, a reason amply confirmed by the Symms amendment: The United States is attempting to renege on its treaty obligations to turn over the Panama Canal to Panama in 1999 and terminate all U.S. military presence in Panama.

Letting the cat out of the bag

The Senate amendment—blacked out of the U.S. press, perhaps to avoid adverse public reaction—reads: “In view of 1) the deteriorating condition of the Panama Canal; 2) the continuing military dictatorship of Gen. Noriega and his involvement in criminal activities, and 3) the refusal of the Panamanian government to accept the DeConcini Reservation concerning U.S. defense rights upon which Senate consent to the ratification of the Panama Canal Treaty was predicated, it is the sense of the Senate that the Senate ought not to have consented to the ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties whereby the Panama Canal was given away and that such treaties are voidable unless and until Panama formally accepts the DeConcini Reservation and should be voided by the President if such acceptance is not forthcoming within six months of the adoption of this section.”

The Symms amendment thus lets the cat out of the bag, confirming the charges of Noriega, Abadía, and other government spokesmen that the only real aim of Panama’s conservative Senate critics is to renege on the Canal Treaties, a

goal they have had since the treaties were first passed. In defending his resolution, Symms treated unsubstantiated allegations against Noriega as proven fact, and went on in his remarks to call both the present government of Panama and that which signed the treaties in 1978 "gangsters." Apart from the fact that even were these allegations true, they are irrelevant to the fulfillment of the treaties; even Senator Dodd was forced to correct Symms, pointing out that the DeConcini Reservation was never part of the treaties.

Beyond planning an international campaign to defend the Canal Treaties as signed, the State Council also resolved to put a halt to the violation of diplomatic norms by the U.S. embassy in Panama. Not only has U.S. Ambassador Arthur Davis and many members of his staff met repeatedly with opposition leaders, they have been intimately involved in plotting the opposition campaign to overthrow the government. Henceforth, Panama will protest every violation of the Vienna Accords governing the behavior of embassies.

In a first step, the government has requested the recall of the embassy's second-in-command, John Maisto, who, if not recalled, will be declared *persona non grata*. Maisto is one of the coordinators of the violent destabilization campaign, which seems to be his only purpose in being there, or anywhere else. He was on hand to coordinate the overthrow of Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos and Haitian dictator "Baby Doc" Duvalier in 1986.

As if to test the new Panamanian resolve, the United States housed a group of U.S. military personnel in the downtown district experiencing frequent opposition demonstrations. Predictably, as police broke up one violent demonstration, nine U.S. servicemen were among those arrested. The U.S. embassy and the Southern Command know better than to station U.S. military personnel in the middle of disturbance-prone districts. A deliberate provocation?

The economic crisis

The Panamanian State Council, composed of the cabinet and the heads of the Supreme Court, the Legislative Assembly, and various state agencies, also resolved on a series of measures to deal with the economic crisis occasioned by three months of destabilization. Other than tightening up government expenditures, freezing government salaries, and lowering the prices of certain staples, the council committed itself to pushing forward an ambitious program of public works, including construction of schools, an airport, rehabilitating the Transisthmian Railroad and major highway routes, developing the port of Balboa, and rehabilitating roads and bridges throughout the country. The council also proposed constructing several new factories and a government center, if foreign credits can be secured.

However, the economic problem is quite acute. Not accidentally, Panama's banking center has lost billions in capital, and other parts of the economy are paralyzed. Government revenues have fallen, and it is not clear how capable the government is of carrying out its program.

Documentation

'We shall not yield'

Excerpts of the speech delivered by Panamanian Foreign Minister Jorge Abadía to the United Nations General Assembly Oct. 1.

On Sept. 7, we commemorated the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties between my country and the United States. . . . Unfortunately [this] did not constitute a celebration for us Panamanians, who underscored the date by voicing our indignation and bitter disappointment at seeing that the disposition and determination at the time the treaties were signed has been distorted and replaced by a plan of aggression. . . .

Panama never had the chance to exercise its right to respond to the media network that has manipulated the news, so the slanders increased and spread; and its damaging effects quickly multiplied, because the moral aggression that comprises phase one of a domination plan was necessary to prepare the U.S. population so that they would not condemn any action against Panama, any injustice, any violation, and any violation of the U.N. and OAS Charters. Since the achievement of this goal implies a deep understanding of the U.S. population's democratic sensibility and a great familiarity with the most effective methods of deceit, to turn a slanderous statement into a generally accepted truth, U.S. embassy personnel in Panama were systematically replaced; administrative and technical personnel were increased. . . . A team was put together to welcome and guide officials, politicians, and correspondents—thus manipulating their views about Panama; and a story on alleged violations of human rights and on the alleged weakness of our democratic institutions was clumsily prepared. It seems that the U.S. diplomatic mission has become a factory of slander and lies that has its own distribution and dissemination mechanisms. . . .

Just three months ago, Panama denounced the U.S. [Senate] resolution that violated fundamental and accepted international principles of the OAS and the Non-Aligned Movement for the peaceful coexistence of nations. In its arrogant excesses, the resolution dared to mention legal norms and formulas that should be applied to relieve Panamanian officials of their posts. These Panamanians had been marked as the underlings that had to disappear from the infamous chessboard they had contrived.

During the past week, chiefs of state or chiefs of government and representatives of different countries expressed their support for the Central American cause and reaffirmed their adherence to the principles of the U.N. Charter at this forum. In the meantime, the U.S. Senate, with absolute dis-

regard for international legal norms, approved a resolution that ties economic assistance, military aid, and exports of weapons to Panama, as well as imports of Panamanian sugar to the U.S., to the establishment within a 45-day period of a transitional civilian government in Panama that would adjust to the will of the U.S. Senators. . . . As if violating the principles of a country's right to self-determination and non-interference were not enough, the Senate's latest resolution infringes on specific norms approved by the U.N. General Assembly. . . .

[Reviews U.N. resolutions against economic warfare and the incidents of U.S. troops in uniform visiting the embassy and a U.S. military helicopter violating Panamanian airspace] . . . The treaties included provisions that even banned the use of foreign military uniforms outside specific, established defense sites, with the exception of official ceremonies. . . . I must stress here that a luncheon meeting of the U.S. ambassador . . . with the leaders of a movement that is trying to overthrow the government of the country to which they are accredited is not an official meeting, but is a planned and deliberate provocation that attempts to create a situation suitable for some violent action that would justify—to U.S. public opinion—an aggression, which is the third phase of the plan.

Why such excesses? Why is such a powerful and huge country so merciless with a nation that has rendered it great services and with a people that always offered it its friendship?

. . . When the position of the four countries of the Contadora Group [Panama, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela] became consolidated with the position of Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay, a member of the U.S. National Security Council came to Panama to personally demand that the Panamanian government withdraw from Contadora. Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega's reply that this demand was an insult to the dignity of his people and nation immediately led to the creation of a plan to subdue Panama. U.S. diplomatic personnel were totally replaced within three months, and then there were changes in the number of technical and administrative personnel and in the number of troops stationed on the banks of the canal, disregarding the ban in this regard in the treaties between the two countries.

The backward forces within the U.S. government that have plotted to destroy the independence of Panama felt it was necessary to replace the Panamanian government with a docile government that would blindly follow orders. . . . [In 1986], President Eric Arturo Delvalle reported . . . that there was a plot to prevent the Canal Treaties from culminating in the canal's being turned over to full Panamanian control at the end of 12 years, simultaneously with the end of the U.S. military presence on our territory. That statement and the additional charges of the many violations committed by the U.S. gave a new impetus to the plan of aggression, which

had already been launched by manipulating some sectors of the U.S. communications media and local and foreign news agencies, to the point that the slanderous ideas that had been invented as the main weapon of the dirty war declared against the men that defend the independence and sovereignty of my country, were accepted as truth.

. . . In the structure, methods, and procedures of the forces it has allied itself with, and in its tactics, the movement that is threatening my country presents terrifying coincidences with the fascist movements that were the scourge of Europe. Despite those coincidences and in support of that movement, the U.S. Senate chose to play the sinister cards of interventionism and economic aggression. That represents a serious danger for the Latin American nations and a palpable threat to world peace. . . .

In the last few years, high-level U.S. officials and military men have been frequently and increasingly presenting the expiration of the Canal Treaties and the end of the U.S. military presence in Panama as a problem that requires immediate attention. The Panamanian government has had only one reply to such inquiries and veiled proposals presented to it, and this has always been that Panama demands that the Canal Treaties be fulfilled to the letter.

Therefore, it is clearly evident that the minority political forces comprising the movement against the Panamanian government have always supported the idea of retaining U.S. military bases in Panama after the year 2000. . . . Recent documents issued by the U.S. Department of State have reached inconceivable extremes of shamelessness. Some of them have recommended measures to form a new government in Panama that would defend U.S. strategic interests. Among this conspiracy's excesses against my country, I cite the fact that the U.S. Senate is trying to impose a provisional government in Panama that—according to repeated public statements made by the seditious group's principal leaders—would have as President the same man who was overthrown in 1941 because of his intentions to ally Panama with Hitler's Germany. . . .

The Republic of Panama is already entitled to invoke the principles of this organization and to resort to all the legitimate means that the norms of international law offer. It begins to do so by denouncing U.S. violations of those principles and norms, first by a prolonged and fierce moral aggression against the Panamanian government, and then with a calculated and despicable economic aggression. In addition, I must say that those principles and norms are in danger of becoming obsolete with the use of force against my country's independence. The magnitude of this danger, Mr. President, must be measured with the knowledge that Panamanians will continue struggling for our national liberation, regardless of the difficult times we might have to face and no matter what the extent of sacrifice may be to defend the Panamanian nation from its aggressors. We will never yield.