

# U.S. press seeks hit on Panama's leader

by D.E. Pettingell

The *New York Times* is using fake revelations in the Nov. 18 Iran-Contra congressional report to cover for an assassination operation against Gen. Manuel A. Noriega, the commander of Panama's Defense Forces. The "secret government" in the United States has failed to depose Noriega, despite its campaign of harassment, media attacks, and economic warfare against Panama.

"Panama's military leader offered to undertake sabotage and possibly assassinations in Nicaragua for the Reagan administration," claimed the *New York Times* Nov. 19, citing unidentified "congressional sources," who, the *Times* says, name Noriega as the "third party" mentioned in the final Iran-Contra congressional report. The report is based on testimony by Project Democracy asset Lt. Col. Oliver North during his closed-door testimony last summer. A Panamanian military officer close to Noriega told the *Miami Herald* Nov. 19 that he had "never made such an offer" to North "or anyone else in the U.S. government." In fact, he said, when National Security Adviser Adm. John Poindexter was in Panama in December 1985, Noriega rebuffed his attempts to "force" support for the Contras.

By saying that Noriega "offered" to kill Sandinista leaders, the *New York Times* is preparing a cover for a hit on Noriega by his Panamanian opposition. It is no secret that the National Civic Crusade of Panama, Inc., the public relations title of the Panamanian oligarchic opposition, is frustrated after six months of failure to gain popular support inside Panama against Noriega. Equally frustrated is the Crusade's U.S. sponsor, the secret government exposed in the Iran-Contra scandal. "Although violence is not our goal," said the Crusade's Washington coordinator Roberto Brenes, "nothing can guarantee that things can't get out of control."

An attempt on Noriega's life would be logically laid at the door of the Crusade. Now, with the *New York Times* black propaganda, others could be blamed: perhaps the Sandinista regime, perhaps the narco-mafia. In fact, were the mafia to kill Noriega, they would be doing it on behalf of—perhaps, even paid by—the opposition they are politically and financially allied with.

The same week, retired Gen. Rubén Darío Paredes, Noriega's predecessor and arch-enemy, chose the pages of the *New York Times* to call for Noriega's resignation, charging Noriega had turned a blind eye to the Medellín Cartel cocaine traffickers. Noriega, he suggested, should go into exile to

"avert a violent outcome." But Paredes, contradicting himself, explained, Noriega "has not directed the wrongdoing." Rather, he has been "mentally deformed and distorted" by "unlimited exercise of power." Paredes even denied allegations that Noriega is a drug trafficker: "I would say that he is not directly involved in drug trafficking."

Last year *EIR* documented in a Special Report on Panama, "Who Is Out to Destabilize the U.S. Ally and Why?" Paredes's relationship to Henry Kissinger and the Medellín Cartel's Ochoa clan, from whom Paredes took bribes to help use Panama as a cocaine-processing center. The scheme was wrecked by Noriega, who also lifted Panama's bank secrecy in order to nail a major drug ring.

*EIR* also exposed the fact that Noriega became the subject of the secret government's vendetta because he refused to support the drug-running Contras. Instead, Noriega has proposed that Central America's armed forces militarily back the Contadora Group's peace efforts.

## 'Parallel government' in action

Since the eruption of the Iran-Contra scandal in October 1986, Project Democracy's hatred of Noriega has become a full-fledged assault to overthrow Panama's constitutional government, weaken its armed forces, and abrogate the U.S.-Panama Canal Treaties. From the White House to Congress, all sectors of Washington's political spectrum have joined to destroy this longstanding U.S. ally. "When you see myself and Senator Helms taking the same side on an issue, you have nothing to worry about," Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) reportedly told the Crusade.

On Nov. 19, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 19-0 on a bill, S. 1614, to cut all U.S. aid to Panama, unless a "non-military transitional government" more pleasing to the United States comes to power. Sponsored by Alfonso D'Amato (R-N.Y.) and supported by Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), Kennedy, and Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), the bill is a dangerous step toward legalizing the policies of the "parallel government" that ran the Iran-Contra operations. The White House has imposed a suspension of aid to Panama since July.

Two amendments were included in S. 1614, on its way to the Senate floor where early action is expected: one for an embargo of all sugar imports from Panama, and the other by Helms, to allow the CIA to continue in Panama, but dealing exclusively with "private citizens," i.e., the "democratic opposition." This happened while Noriega was in Argentina at a yearly conference of American army heads. In statements to Spain's EFE news agency, Noriega called for the opposition to "respect the 1989 election timetable," instead of being used by the U.S. confrontationists. Noriega told the Reagan administration to "get its hands out of our domestic affairs." Regarding the accusations against him in the U.S. media, Noriega said they were "part of the dirty war" and that the media were using "psychological methods to break the Panamanian people's nationalistic and anti-colonialist will."