

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### U.S. invasion seen imminent

*The military threat comes just as demands grow for the U.S. to end its failed economic boycott.*

The U.S. troops in Panama "are staging daily provocations in the hope of causing a confrontation to justify military action," said the President of Panama's Legislative Assembly Celso Carrizo on July 30 in Mexico, where he had gone to firm up the support obtained in June at the Conference of Latin American Parliamentarians for Panama. Carrizo added that there are 24,000 American troops in Panama—twice the number allowed by the 1977 Panama Canal Treaties.

The same day in Cartagena, Colombia, Panama's foreign minister, Jorge Ritter, said "a U.S. military intervention in Panama is imminent." Ritter said that "the number of coercive actions and military maneuvers in my country by the U.S. Southern Command, based in the Canal Zone, have increased; they are very frequent and suspicious."

Manuel Solís Palma, the President of Panama, said that these actions have been carried out under what U.S. National Security Adviser Gen. Brent Scowcroft "claims is a right of 'unimpeded movement,' which is not granted by the treaties." Invoking "this right to trample," the Panamanian President noted in a guest column published by the Mexican daily *Unomásuno* July 28, that the U.S. military in Panama have repeatedly occupied towns, taken over the water plant that supplies one-third of the population, and daily "invade densely populated urban areas with hundreds of heavily armed soldiers, and armored vehicles with medium-sized artillery."

Solís Palma, who has frequently

said that the attacks against Panama are to further the U.S. global power-sharing deals with the Soviet Union, warned that what is happening endangers all of Ibero-America. He pointed out that "as an insult to the rest of the Latin American countries," American troops in Panama, "carried out very threatening maneuvers, with extensive personnel and much equipment, on the three occasions when an Organization of American States special mission visited Panama."

Accusing the Bush administration of carrying out a policy of "cruel duplicity toward Panama," he said the U.S. has adopted the thesis of "official ideologue Reinhold Niebuhr that 'the most important characteristic of a nation is hypocrisy.'" For example, the U.S. has tried to shut down Panama's banking center, arguing that it launders drug money. But, "the more than \$20 billion that left Panama in the last two years, ended up in banks in Miami, where they changed the laws to take deposits without too many questions." Similarly, he said, the U.S. invented the charge that the commander of Panama Defense Forces, Gen. Manuel Noriega, is a drug trafficker, to justify its interventionist policy.

The head of the Army component of the U.S. Southern Command, Gen. Marc Cisneros, told the Spanish news agency EFE on July 8 that he didn't believe that the OAS diplomatic efforts could solve the crisis and that the U.S. should use force "to overthrow General Noriega and to restore democracy to this country." He said that the Panamanians would surrender "30

minutes" after the U.S. issued an ultimatum and that there would be no objections from the nations of Ibero-America: "A U.S. military intervention would pass as an event without major importance. Publicly each country would say it was against it, because they have to say that, but many would applaud."

U.S. preparations for war in Panama include the naming on July 20 of Gen. Maxwell R. Thurman to replace Gen. Fred Woerner as commander of SouthCom. Sources also note that Gen. John F. Stewart, a veteran of the 1983 invasion of Grenada, is in charge of U.S. Army Intelligence in Panama.

Tens of thousands of Panamanians took to the streets on July 31 to protest U.S. aggression. The demonstrators, shouting "Cisneros, you will go before Noriega," marched on the anniversary of the death of Gen. Omar Torrijos, the nationalist leader who negotiated the 1977 treaties.

The moves for a military intervention come as demands grow that the U.S. end another stupid policy, the economic sanctions against Panama. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Panama said, in a report published by *La Estrella de Panama* July 31, that "not only have the sanctions failed in their purpose, but they have also had unacceptably counterproductive effects . . . the only losers in this case, have been American companies." The U.S. Chamber said one result has been to benefit countries other than the United States, "including those behind the Iron Curtain."

Instead of sanctions, the Chamber proposed that the U.S. invest in basic infrastructure projects in Panama, "including ports, railroads, electrification, and water." It called for expanding "the Culebra Cut in the Panama Canal, which, it is projected, will inject some \$750 million into the economy."