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## Interview: Miguel Bush

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*The following interview with Panamanian Congressman Miguel Bush, Chairman of the Legislative Assembly Judiciary Committee, was conducted by Carlos Wesley, on June 24, in Washington, D.C.*



**EIR:** Congressman Bush, what is the purpose of your visit to Washington? You were here only three months ago. Why have you returned so soon?

**Bush:** The last time I was here in Washington, I met with several Congressmen, friends of mine, who are concerned about the situation currently ongoing along our border with Colombia, and about the information we have received from various friendly South American intelligence agencies, as well as some local ones. We were concerned, because we had learned that, once the negotiations to establish a MAC [Multilateral Anti-Drug Center] in Panama had failed, some interests were seeking some form of confrontation—not provoked by us—to justify the presence of U.S. troops in Panama beyond the year 2000.

This brought us to the United States three months ago, to seek support from Congressmen, to help us obtain the necessary funds so that we could then present a bill to the Legislative Assembly for the creation of an Interior Ministry, which would facilitate the creation of a 5,000-man elite unit, a border police or border guard, with responsibility for protecting our border with Colombia. One which would be well-equipped, militarily, to confront the FARC narco-guerrillas, and also to have a contingent which would take responsibility for our commitment under the Torrijos-Carter Treaty, to patrol the banks of the Panama Canal.

Over these past three months, Panama's situation has changed dramatically, to the point that in the last three weeks, there have been incursions from both [Colombian] paramilitary groups and units of the FARC into our territory. I would say that this situation is being run by elements of the U.S. State Department, because the U.S. Ambassador to Panama, Simón Ferro, immediately said that they could order a mobilization of their troops into the area.

We have come to this country, and have discovered with great sadness that the possibility of legalizing drugs is already being discussed in the U.S. Congress. And since the State Department is not really interested in a frontal war against drugs in Panama, much less in Colombia, this tells me that there are other dark interests behind all this.

At the same time, I find that on June 22, the head of the U.S. Southern Command, Gen. Charles Wilhelm, proposed that the United States could unilaterally invade our country, occupy it once again, and send troops to Darién province [the border area with Colombia]—which creates a difficult situation. I think that General Wilhelm should direct his attacks against the State Department. And I will explain why: The ones who are meeting with the FARC are not the Colombian Army, which is in an all-out battle against the FARC in Colombia; it is not the Panamanian government, which is affected by the incursions of the paramilitaries and the FARC. Rather, it is the State Department, and even some members of the U.S. Congress, who are meeting with the FARC, virtually giving them recognition as belligerents, as a state within another state. It would appear that the State Department has two agendas: one, what they tell their people, which is that they are fighting drugs; and another, which is the real one, which is that there is no interest in fighting the drug trade, but rather in maintaining and increasing it until a law comes out of the U.S. Senate and Congress to legalize drugs.

**EIR:** It would appear that the essence of the matter is Howard Air Base. Why did the negotiations with the United States fail, and is Panama still disposed toward establishing a Multilateral Anti-Drug Center?

**Bush:** Look, it was, and continues to be, in agreement with establishing a Multilateral Anti-Drug Center at Howard Air Base, or anywhere else. The problem is the following:

First, they want an agreement for twelve years. Panama said three years, that twelve years was too long a period of time. And that every three years, we could review whether the center is operating effectively and could approve it for three more years.

Second, they are asking that we give diplomatic status to their forces, to their entire military contingent. That is unacceptable to Panama.

Third, is that they do not just want the center to fight drugs and money laundering. They want other things, too. For example, if they have a problem in Argentina, they want to be able to use the Howard base for sending a rapid-deployment elite force into Argentina. We could not permit that, because that would be intervention, using our territory to intervene into another South American nation.

Now, General Wilhelm is a very good soldier, a good military strategist, but he knows absolutely nothing about the diplomatic agreements among states. He says that it would be ideal for the United States to negotiate an agreement for access to Panamanian airstrips for anti-drug patrol flights, like Washington has with Ecuador, Aruba, and Curaçao. But the agreements Washington has with Ecuador, Aruba, and Curaçao involve no more than 30 American soldiers. What the Americans want in Panama is more than 2-3,000 soldiers.

So, this is not an agreement like that with Aruba, Curaçao, and Ecuador.

**EIR:** Is Panama prepared to sign an agreement like the ones with Aruba, Curaçao, and Ecuador?

**Bush:** Why not? Where there are no more than 30 soldiers? Please. And that they pay for the use of the airstrips. But that would have to be exclusively for anti-drug use. It could not be to intervene if there is a situation that arises in a fellow South American country. For example, the case of Brazil: I have heard an American politician say that if the governor of São Paulo state refuses to pay debt service, they would have to militarily intervene in São Paulo, Brazil. And they want Howard for that. It cannot be. Panama cannot lend itself to that.

**EIR:** How have your meetings with members of the U.S. Congress gone this week?

**Bush:** I think that the majority of Congressmen are not aware of the problem with Panama, but to the extent that we have been explaining what is going on, they have indicated their readiness to help us obtain the resources we need to carry out our proposal: the creation of an elite force to patrol our border and the shores of the Panama Canal. And they are aware that it is we Panamanians who must defend our borders.

**EIR:** In 1989, the United States invaded Panama, supposedly to do away with the drug trade, and accused Gen. Manuel Noriega of being tied to drug traffickers. In the ten years since then, has the drug trade been noticeably reduced in Panama?

**Bush:** I think that President Bush of the Republican Party—and I pray that the American people do not make a mistake and vote again for the Republican Party and for Bush’s son—miserably tricked the American people. Because it turned out that, once they had captured Noriega, that is when more cocaine began to flow into the United States from several points, among them Panama. The statistics offered by the U.S. DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] and FBI indicated how, when Noriega ruled in Panama, drug flow into the United States was less than after they captured him.

This means, and I repeat this again, that President Bush fooled his people at the time.

If they had not destroyed our Defense Forces, which was an army prepared to meet the demands of the new millennium, which was to guard the Panama Canal and our borders—remember, the fight against the drug trade has to be carried out not by police, but by an army well-equipped with helicopters, with destroyers, with planes, and we could only do that once the U.S. troops were withdrawn from Panama. But the State Department, very cleverly, ordered the destruction of that institution, and imposed on the government of President Ernesto Pérez Balladares the elimination of the very concept of the army from our Constitution.

And what goal did they seek? Now that they must withdraw from our country, they say that, since we don’t have an army (the army that they themselves ordered destroyed), they will have to come and protect our borders, and the Panama Canal for us.

Their purpose is not to fight drugs. If they were interested in ending the drug trade in Colombia, they would have strengthened the Colombian Army three, four, five times. And they have done just the opposite: They have weakened it, and President Andrés Pastrana has practically allowed the insurgents to control nearly 40% of Colombian territory.

**EIR:** This is undeniably true, but now we have a reality in which we have the FARC and the paramilitaries crossing the border, and Panama obviously cannot protect itself. For example, the current National Police of Panama, do they have the equipment necessary to confront these threats?

**Bush:** They do not; truly they do not. We have made an effort, and we have allocated additional monies in our budget of nearly \$1 million, to put more than 1,200 men along our whole border, both on the Atlantic and the Pacific. But we only have three very old patrol boats, and no helicopters.

**EIR:** Only three patrol boats?

**Bush:** Three boats for both oceans, the Pacific and the Caribbean. We have no armored helicopters, which means that, of the five or six helicopters that a high-level Senate official very proudly told me had been donated—yes, helicopters that were already obsolete, that were already taken out of service.

There is no real interest on the part of the State Department in helping Panama in the fight against drugs. Further, we have repeatedly discovered, that many of the prominent businessmen who are received with such pomp and circumstance here in Washington, own companies that are dedicated to the laundering of dirty money.

So, what are we saying? There is no interest in fighting drugs. And it is important to stress this, so that the American people understand this: Those most affected by the dirty narcotics trade are the minorities, the African-Americans, and the Hispanic sectors of your population. And, it would appear that this is a lucrative business that some interested parties here in Washington want to see maintained.

**EIR:** On the Colombian side, during the time that Gen. Harold Bedoya was in charge, the Colombian Armed Forces issued a book in which the FARC was described as the “Third Cartel.” What do you think of this?

**Bush:** I think that General Bedoya was a soldier—he is now retired—who was very honest, a nationalist soldier who loved his country. He always maintained that the guerrillas could be defeated, that a different Colombia could be achieved. But there were interests, not necessarily Colombian, but from

outside Colombia, that succeeded in getting him thrown out of the military leadership. And these are precisely the interests which today conspire, which seek to balkanize, to divide Colombia, as they are doing at this very moment, which is affecting all of us. These are exogenous forces; they are foreign forces.

**EIR:** It would seem that there are certain circles which believe that one must negotiate with the terrorists and legalize drugs, because they cannot be defeated. Is narco-terrorism invincible?

**Bush:** [Peruvian President Alberto] Fujimori is defeating terrorism in Peru every day. He has them surrounded; the whole coca zone in Peru is being controlled. This guy has proven who wears the pants.

And, let me just say that he has given a great lesson to the leading power in the world. I would say that it appears that there are U.S. interests, even sectors of the U.S. political class, who see the drug trade as a fruitful one. I understand that in just one year, more than \$500 billion in narcotics has been moved into the United States.

This is a trade that is going to destroy American youth. It is sad. I say this to you because I come from a country where I have seen the ravages of cocaine, of what they call “crack” in this country, and of other by-products of cocaine, of bazuco, and there are others still worse than bazuco. I see how the U.S. political class is already viewing the matter of drugs as a good trade. This is the impression that I carry back with me when I return to my country.

**EIR:** Another person who seems to favor the FARC is Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. What do you think?

**Bush:** Look, it saddens me, because I think that—well, this is a Venezuelan matter, which sometimes one shouldn’t get involved with, because it is an issue for Venezuelans, but I am a Latin American and sometimes it is sad. The Venezuelan people chose Hugo Chávez, and saw him as a hope, saw him as a Simón Bolívar, as an Omar Torrijos. And in practice, it is disheartening when one learns that a butcher such as George Bush, whom we drove out of Panama in tears, when he was in the Plaza Porras—when we learn that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez went happily to congratulate Bush at his birthday party in Texas.

And I say it is sad because Hugo Chávez should remember that one of those who insisted that he be sent to jail when Carlos Andrés Pérez was President, was precisely Bush, because he [Chávez] opposed the International Monetary Fund measures. Now, it appears that Hugo Chávez is going to endorse that which led him, with good reason, to rise up against Carlos Andrés Pérez.

We in Panama watched Hugo Chávez as a candidate, and saw, “Oh, we are going to have a man who will help orient Latin America in the fight against the International Monetary

Fund.” And it turned out exactly the opposite; that is, it appears to be that what he is going to do, is represent the interests of the IMF. Chávez wasted a great opportunity to become a great leader, such as Tomás Torrijos Herrera. But, such are the sad things of politics.

**EIR:** Yesterday, at the *EIR* seminar, you said that Lyndon LaRouche’s doctrine was a solution not only for the United States, but for other peoples. What do you mean by that?

**Bush:** The reconstruction program that Lyndon LaRouche proposes in his Presidential campaign book, *Road to Recovery*, lays out for you the concept of the defense of the nation, of the interests of our nations, of the interests of integrating the struggle for the poor in the country and in the city, in defense of our natural resources. And that we should once and for all rid ourselves of the usurers, of the International Monetary Fund. So, these are measures that are not only good for the United States. Now that I have returned, I have realized how, in the case of heavy industry, in the case of automobile production, for example, I see already the practice of American industrialists, how workers are affected within the framework of globalization, how they are sending their industry to Mexico, where miserable wages are paid. And you can see how that same merchandise is returned to the U.S. at two or three times the price, but leaving a pauperized, unemployed working class in the streets.

We believe that the LaRouche doctrine could also be applied to Latin America. How long has it been since a President of the United States has looked toward Latin America? I remember the last was Kennedy. I remember that he did it in such a way that, through the institutions, his intelligence efforts also penetrated, but something came.

**EIR:** During yesterday’s seminar, Debra Freeman referred to the great work you did ten years ago, when LaRouche was in jail, and you responded to the call to get him out of jail.

**Bush:** Truly, I feel very honored and very gratified by that recognition given me by Mrs. Freeman, because Mr. LaRouche is a man of continental stature. He is a man who not only offers his views here in the United States, but in other parts of the world.

**EIR:** Your party lost in the recent Presidential elections in Panama, although it maintains control in Congress. What do you think of President-elect Mireya Moscoso?

**Bush:** She said in her election campaign that tariffs were going to be raised again, to protect the agricultural sector. I am certain that, in this, I am going to support her. She said that she would ease off from the neo-liberal [free-trade] policies; in this, too, she can count on our support. And, if these were merely electoral promises, we are going to demand from the Assembly that she meet those promises. Because I think that that is a commitment that she has made

with the people, and I think that we can together approve laws of a social nature to the benefit of our people.

**EIR:** Finally, I have just learned that you are sponsoring a youth chamber orchestra, and want to organize a complete symphony orchestra of 140. Why this initiative, and what are the antecedents to this initiative?

**Bush:** Well, this is the influence of LaRouche! I was raised in a tough city, Colón, a city where, as we *Colonenses* say, you gamble your life on the streets. And the only music that we knew, was our own music — well, first, that of the Caribbean, second, of my country, and third, the bad influence of U.S. music, of rock, of reggae. And I think that we have forgotten universal culture, Classical music, which is not the property of the rich, but belongs to all people.

Two years ago, we created the chamber orchestra. I have financed it with more than \$50,000 from my discretionary fund. There is a group of some ten music teachers, headed by Prof. Felipe Hudson, working on this in Colón. We give music classes and teach instruments to children from four to twelve years of age. And they are the ones who take part in the chamber orchestra. Now, we want to create a youth symphony orchestra of 140 children, who are already training. And once they are trained and we have been able to acquire instruments, we are going to give concerts in the poor neighborhoods

where there is the highest incidence of crime, and which are the most devastated by the drug trade.

**EIR:** How has the orchestra affected the children and their parents so far?

**Bush:** You would not believe it. These children wake their parents very early, or remind them in the afternoon: “Papa, remember that you have to take us to practice.” You see how the mother and the father bring their children to practice. Look, it is beautiful to see when the mother and the father accompany their children, to watch them practice and learn an instrument like the violin, the ’cello, the guitar, the saxophone, the flute. It is beautiful, because you see the mother and the father sitting together. This helps to unify the family, at a moment when family disintegration is a serious problem in Panama, and in my district in Colón, more than anything because of drug trafficking.

So, this is also a way of saying no to drugs, because the children find culture there, a way of forgetting that tragic effect caused by drugs.

It is a beautiful thing, indescribable. If you could only see those parents sitting there. When there are performances, you see the mother and the father with their little sons and daughters. I never had this opportunity as a child, and that is why I am doing this now.

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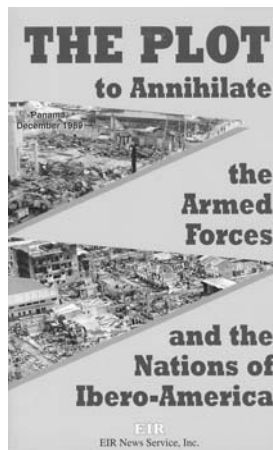
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