

## Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

### Back on the front-burner

*With the U.S. elections over, the question of Panama is once again becoming a hot issue for State Department planners.*

**T**he Soviet Union has now made its move to become a major player in the Panama crisis, while U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams, who has taken the point in Project Democracy's failed plot against Panama, has signaled a new offensive, now that the constraints imposed by the presidential campaign have been removed.

On Nov. 1, Soviet Ambassador to the United States Yuri Dubinin went to the headquarters of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, to deliver a document from Mikhail Gorbachov. The document officially made the U.S.S.R. a signatory of the Panama Canal Treaties' Neutrality Protocol, which declares the Canal Zone neutral territory accessible to all nations. The Soviets thus became the 37th nation to adhere to the Neutrality Protocol, 11 years after the treaties went into effect.

There were differing opinions as to why the Soviets did this. Sources in the Panamanian opposition claimed the Soviets were backing the head of the Panama Defense Forces (PDF), Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, who has successfully led the fight against the State Department's two year-long effort to oust him, dismantle the PDF, and install a new government in Panama willing to agree to an extension of the American presence past the year 2000. Under the treaties, Panama assumes sole control of all canal installations in that year.

But at the beginning of October, the State Department, through its embassy in Panama, stated, "The Soviet recognition of neutrality was to strengthen the hand of the United States to deal with Noriega without

fear of reprisals," as the *Washington Post* put it Nov. 2.

The Soviets, of course, have their own agenda: to have the canal placed under supranational control. Under their plan, detailed in various official Soviet publications, the United States would remove its military bases from Panama, and the PDF would also withdraw from the Canal Zone. Defense of canal neutrality would then be assumed by an international peace-keeping force that would include Red Army troops.

At the signing ceremonies at the OAS, the U.S. representative stated that the United States would fully comply with all the provisions in the treaties.

But, with the stupidity that has characterized U.S. policy toward Panama for the past two years, Elliott Abrams had stated the opposite only days earlier. "Anyone who is dedicated to keeping those treaties should recognize that it is critical to get rid of Noriega," according to a Reuters wire Oct. 28.

In a Cable News Network interview that day, Abrams said that another offensive against Noriega would have to wait until after the elections. "You really can't do that at this point without the President-elect being involved in the decision," he said.

The quiet hysteria provoked by Noriega's firm refusal to step down, which would have been equivalent to sacrificing his nation's sovereignty, prompted Henry Kissinger to offer his own analysis Oct. 26 at the National Press Club in Washington. The United States should not undertake to overthrow a foreign government unless it

has a viable option to replace it with.

But Abrams and his crowd have been unable to develop a viable opposition to Noriega, and they will find the going more difficult during the next few months: Many of the leaders of the opposition working with the State Department will be scrambling to stay out of jail in the United States!

*EIR*, at the outset of the State Department's Panama fiasco, reported that Noriega was quite innocent of the charges in his Miami "drug-trafficking" indictment. It was the State Department-courted opposition that was guilty. And, sure enough, U.S. anti-drug forces have once again been forced to act against Panamanian opposition forces because of such complicity in the drug trade.

At the end of October, it was revealed that Dadeland National Bank of Florida was one of 41 banks in the United States whose records had been subpoenaed by federal officials in a probe of drug-money laundering.

Dadeland is owned by Roberto ("Bobby") Eisenmann, Carlos Rodriguez, and Guillermo ("Billy") Ford, who are among those Abrams has been trying to bring to power in Panama, as an alternative to Noriega.

This isn't the first time Dadeland and its owners have been implicated in drug-money laundering. Eisenmann, depicted in the United States as a "courageous publisher" of the opposition newspaper *La Prensa*, sat on the board of directors of the Banco Continental de Panamá, which laundered \$40 million for the drug-trafficking Colombian cartel of Jorge Luis Ochoa.

In 1984, federal prosecutors in Florida indicted the drug-trafficking ring of Antonio ("Tony") Fernández. During the trial, it came out that Eisenmann's bank had been laundering that ring's drug profits since at least 1976.