

Panama Report by Carlos Wesley

Invasion mooted at summit

Panamanians warned Bush that Noriega's assassination will bring reprisals from all Ibero-American nations.

The assassination of Gen. Manuel Noriega, commander of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF), and plans for a military intervention against Panama were among the topics discussed by President George Bush and Ibero-American leaders at the hemispheric summit held in Costa Rica Oct. 28-29. At a press conference in San José, the Costa Rican capital, Bush claimed that Noriega is doomed. "The day of the despot, the day of the dictator is over," he ranted.

Venezuela's President Carlos Andrés Pérez, along with Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, who hosted the summit, worked with Bush to provide a cover for a U.S. military intervention. The plan would "enlist token Latin American military forces or aid in any U.S. armed action against Panama," reported the *Baltimore Sun* on Oct. 28.

Pérez, who collaborated with Bush in the failed Oct. 3 coup attempt against Noriega, worked with Arias to draft statements condemning Noriega for adoption by the summit. Among the proposals was a plan for the nations of Ibero-America individually to break diplomatic relations with Panama.

But the summit concluded without issuing any declarations on Panama or any other topic. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico did not show up. Neither did the Presidents of Bolivia, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, or Peru; and without their public endorsement, any condemnation of Panama would be meaningless.

The summit was doomed to failure long before those nations decided to

stay away. Billed as a celebration of the centennial of Costa Rican democracy, the summit was really intended to provide a forum for Bush to tell Ibero-American leaders to get behind the U.S. power-sharing arrangements with the U.S.S.R. The expectations were that the U.S. ouster of Noriega would serve as an object lesson for any other leader who dared to challenge the new order. This scenario, of course, fell through after the Oct. 3 attempted coup fiasco.

In the end, the summit degenerated into a circus, with no substantive discussion of any of the serious points on the agenda: debt, development, drugs, and "democracy." And while Panama's President Francisco Rodríguez was not invited because "he was not democratically elected," the head of Nicaragua's Sandinista regime, Daniel Ortega, was.

Bush and Ortega engaged in a silly game of "photo opportunity," with Bush doing his darndest to avoid being photographed with Ortega. "He's always sidling up to me looking for some kind of photo op," said Bush. Ortega, who presides over a Soviet client-state, got his picture. He also hogged the headlines by first canceling, then reinstating, and then canceling again a cease-fire with the Nicaraguan Contras, whom the United States is sacrificing in the horse trading with the Russians.

While in Costa Rica, Bush met with Guillermo Endara and other leaders of the Panamanian version of the Contras, the CIA-financed Panamanian Democratic Opposition Civic Alliance (ADO-C). After the meeting, Endara "practically called for the as-

sassination" of Noriega during a televised interview, charged Panama's Interior and Justice Minister Renato Pereira. Reportedly Endara said that Noriega would leave office "dressed in wooden pajamas before the end of the year."

Hauled before the authorities upon returning to Panama, Endara denied that he had called for Noriega's assassination, but admitted to making "joking" remarks that could have led to that conclusion.

For the Panamanians, the murder of Noriega is no laughing matter. The national committee of the ruling Democratic Revolutionary Party approved a resolution on Oct. 28 saying, "We hold the Bush administration and its internal allies responsible for the unfathomable consequences which the plans to murder Commander Manuel Antonio Noriega imply for Panama and the continent." They warned that any attempt against Noriega would be countered in such a way, "that no place in our country or Latin America will be safe for the enemies of national liberation."

In an open letter to the Presidents of Latin America, President Rodríguez repeated the offer he made to the United Nations on Oct. 3, for Panama to be the headquarters of a multinational force against drug trafficking, provided "that such a force is established through an international treaty that guarantees that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations is respected."

The Panamanian President chastised his Ibero-American colleagues for calling for democracy in Panama, "without once mentioning the merciless economic, political, and diplomatic aggression that the U.S. has launched against us, and without mentioning the permanent harassment by U.S. armed forces against our territory."