

Bush plans to keep U.S. troops in Panama forever

by Carlos Wesley

President George Bush plans to continue the U.S. occupation of Panama forever. Although the supposed chief aim of the invasion was achieved on Jan. 3, when Gen. Manuel Noriega surrendered to U.S. forces to prevent a threatened attack against the Vatican's embassy in Panama, the puppet government installed by Bush is being run by the U.S. occupation forces.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported Jan. 1, "The man who runs Panama has an office in the Presidential Palace and roars through town in a bulletproof limousine accompanied by armored bodyguards who wear ominous dark glasses. He decides who can walk free and who goes to jail, when citizens can be on the street and when they have to be in their houses, and even what avenues are open to traffic. This man is not President Guillermo Endara. . . . He isn't even a Panamanian. . . . His name is John Bushnell—and he is the closest thing the United States has to a proconsul." Bushnell, the number-two man at the U.S. embassy in Panama, has since been superseded by Deane Hinton, who was appointed Jan. 2 as the new ambassador.

EIR repeatedly warned since the campaign against Panama was launched in 1985, that the U.S. was out to destroy Panama's Defense Forces in order to renege on the 1977 Panama Canal treaties, which call for the United States to turn over the canal to Panama in the year 2000, and to withdraw its military bases in Panama.

In our *White Paper on the Panama Crisis*, first issued in July 1986, we said that the recolonization of Panama was part of a project "to establish a new supranational global order, run as a condominium between Western bankers and the Russians." We also said that the grouping the U.S. wanted to install in power in Panama is "neither honest nor democratic, but rather frontmen working for the drug mafia: drug money launderers, lawyers for cocaine and marijuana traffickers, terrorists." One of their aims, we said, "is to eliminate the Panamanian military outright."

Our warnings have been confirmed. Bush has ordered the dismantling of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF). Puppet-President Guillermo Endara announced Dec. 28 that Panama will not have an army, just a police force. As the *Washington Post* commented, the decision "would also indicate a continued major role here for the U.S. military, especially after Panama assumes full control of the Panama Canal in 2000." The operational commander of the U.S. invading

forces, Lt. Gen. Carl Stiner, said that the new force "will be armed only with shotgun and pistols," reported the *Washington Post* Jan. 6.

Narco-fascism

U.S. occupation forces in Panama are implementing police-state measures to eliminate any nationalist opposition to the occupation or to the drug-linked government of Endara, and his vice presidents Ricardo Arias Calderón and Guillermo "Billy" Ford. Thousands of Panamanian civilians are being detained daily for questioning, and many are being held in concentration camps set up by the occupation forces. On Dec. 29, Elmo Martínez Blanco, former Minister of Industry and Commerce, was taken handcuffed from his home by U.S. soldiers. His family has not seen him since. The same happened to labor leader Mauro Murillo, and to economist Rafael Mezquita.

This is complemented by a campaign of psychological terror designed to stamp out any nationalist sentiments. The print media is publishing "enemies lists," to sow fear and distrust among the population.

Former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark charged in Panama Jan. 6 that the American media is engaged in a "conspiracy of silence," by not reporting on the political persecution and by hiding the true number of civilians killed by the invading forces. When a hostile reporter said that "only 89 civilians were killed" and challenged Clark's claim that the number of victims was at least 4,000, Clark replied that he had personally examined one mass grave, 40 yards long, 6 yards wide, and at least 5 yards deep. "You do not need mass graves to bury 89 bodies," said Clark.

There is increasing evidence that the invasion and the occupation was targeted mainly against Panama's black and mestizo population, and other minorities, including Jews. Widespread looting during the invasion destroyed 90% of Jewish-owned businesses in Panama City, with losses approaching \$1 billion, said Moisés Mizrachi, head of Panama's Anti-Defamation League. The lie put out by the media is that the looting was carried out by the Dignity Battalions loyal to Noriega. Yet the occupation forces did almost nothing to stop the looting. If the looters were indeed Noriega's forces, why didn't the invaders shoot?

Mizrachi further pointed out that Endara was a "protégé of [Arnulfo] Arias," the Nazi former President, whom he

described as “anti-Jewish, anti-Negro and anti-Oriental.” Mizrahi maintained, however, that Endara himself “harbors no anti-Semitism.”

Total losses to the Panamanian economy may exceed \$2 billion. But, despite promises by Bush that he will help to rebuild the economy, so far the only money made available is a small portion of the Panamanian funds the U.S. held in escrow as part of its sanctions against Noriega. In fact, while Panamanian economists say the U.S. owes Panama at least \$700 million, Washington only acknowledges a debt of \$370 million. The administration says the U.S. alone will not pay for the cost of rebuilding Panama, and says that help should be provided by Japan, Europe, and financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund. But those institutions will not lend any money “until Panama pays \$400 million in back loans, and adopts structural reforms,” reported Mexico’s *El Financiero* Jan. 1.

There have been some cracks in this conspiracy of silence, at least regarding the drug connections of the puppet government. On Dec. 31 *Jornal do Brasil*, Brazil’s largest daily, ran a front-page article on the “special vulnerability of Guillermo Endara,” because of his connections to Carlos Eleta, “accused in the United States of laundering money and trafficking in 600 kilos of cocaine.” Vice President Arias Calderón’s brother Jaime is tied to the First Interamericas Bank, whose owner, Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, was accused in 1985 of overseeing the transfer of \$46 million in drug proceeds to the Banco Cafetero Panama in New York, the paper reported. As for Billy Ford, he is implicated with politicians Carlos Rodríguez (Endara’s ambassador to Washington) and Bobby Eisenmann in the laundering of drug funds through the Dadeland National Bank in Miami.

The *Miami Herald* reported Jan. 5 on the ties between Medellín Cartel money launderer Ramon Milian Rodríguez and Henry Ford, brother of Panama’s second vice president, Guillermo Ford. Milian Rodríguez “laundered millions of dollars in drug money in the early 1980s through a Panamanian company in which Ford’s brother Henry was an officer.”

The same day, the *Oakland Tribune* came out with an editorial stating: “It is significant that Noriega’s political foes, who now enjoy power, opposed a rollback in the country’s bank secrecy law that passed the legislature in December 1986.”

One of those mentioned by the *Oakland Tribune* is Rogelio Cruz, installed by the U.S. occupation forces as Panama’s new Attorney General. Cruz was a member of the board of directors of First Interamericas bank, which was closed down by the Panamanian government in 1985, after a joint operation with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration revealed that the bank was engaged in money laundering and that its principal shareholder was Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, kingpin of the Cali cocaine cartel.

Backlash against U.S. invasion begins

by Gretchen Small

Bush administration officials appear as confident that Ibero-America will soon accept U.S. occupation of Panama as a *fait accompli*, as they were that the Panama Defense Forces would lay down their arms without a fight. So confident is President Bush, in fact, that he sent Henry Kissinger down to Caracas Dec. 29 to meet with Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez and his shady business sidekick Gustavo Cisneros, to work out how to quickly “mop up” continental resistance to U.S. plans to eliminate Panama as a nation. Upon leaving their pleasant luncheon, Kissinger assured the press that “Panama is an incident” which will soon blow over.

Indeed, the United States has deployed unprecedented diplomatic and military pressure to silence Ibero-American resistance as quickly as possible. Every U.S. asset in the region has been activated in support of the invasion, while wire services pump out a steady stream of propaganda that all resistance throughout the region has collapsed.

Despite the pressure, however, the U.S.-imposed Guillermo Endara government in Panama has thus far been recognized by only four countries: the United States, Great Britain, Luxembourg, and Dominica. From the standpoint of Ibero-American patriots, a battle as during the 1982 Malvinas War is again taking shape, to defend the continent’s right to sovereign development against the attempt to subjugate it to Anglo-American rule.

‘You’re with us, or we’re against you’

The veiled ultimatum issued to the Argentine government by Bush’s ambassador to Argentina Terence Todman, exemplified Washington’s message. “We regret that those who, for years, have expressed their support for hemispheric efforts to liberate Panama from the Noriega regime, now do not deem it appropriate to support the United States in the necessary measures which we have carried out,” Todman stated in a Dec. 21 communiqué. “The decision of President Bush to act with firmness and legitimacy in self-defense and in the name of the conscience and democratic norms, deserves not opprobrium, but the full support of all sister democracies.”

Within 24 hours of Todman’s communiqué, Argentine Army officials announced that retired Col. Mohamed Alí Seineldín—who issued a Dec. 22 appeal for all American patriots to support Panama against the “aggression against the principle of national sovereignty”—had been placed un-