

## White House is Al Haig's target in Central America

by Gretchen Small

President Reagan gave tacit approval to Mexico's proposal for a mediated Central American settlement when he obliged Secretary of State Haig to meet at length March 14 and 15 with Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda in New York. Haig and Castañeda are reported to have worked out "concrete proposals" to alleviate the crisis, and the Mexican Foreign Minister said he will relay the American position to the Cubans and Nicaraguans.

Although "Mexico cannot negotiate for us," Reagan said during a visit to Montgomery, Alabama, the Mexican initiative is a welcome effort to "open doors." Privately, Mexican and American officials close to both presidents are optimistic about a dialogue.

However, though it appears that Castañeda is under orders from his President—despite his proclivities to do the bidding of the Socialist International—the same cannot be said of Haig. In depending on Alexander Haig to coordinate with Mexico to bring stability to the region, Reagan is calling on a pyromaniac to put out a fire.

The White House decision to go with the Mexican proposal followed a week of provocations, military preparations, and an unmatched display of intelligence incompetence that looked almost deliberate on the part of Haig. The Secretary of State had accomplished two things: First, his efforts to come up with evidence of "powerful" Cuban and Soviet intervention made Washington a world laughing stock. Second, his theatrics were exactly what the radical right and left extremes in Central America wanted to justify their own policies.

Haig's bull-in-a-china-shop routine began when the American press ran front-page coverage of well-timed State Department "leaks" of plans for covert U.S. action against Nicaragua, including backing of paramilitary

commandos operating along the Honduras-Nicaragua border and funding opposition layers inside Nicaragua. Next came the dramatic State Department presentation of glossy photos of Soviet installations in Nicaragua, shown by the same photo expert used to recognize the Soviet missile sites in Cuba in 1962.

### Predictable response

The Nicaraguans responded exactly as they were supposed to. Nicaragua's new ambassador to Washington quickly announced that if the threat of invasion and covert operations continues, his government will feel fully justified in buying MIG fighters from the Soviets. "If we did not build up our defenses after what is happening now," echoed Managua's Agriculture Minister, "we would be very irresponsible."

The dynamiting of two bridges in northern Nicaragua a few days later added to the paranoia. Managua imposed a 30-day state of emergency, suspended some civil liberties, and put the militia on alert.

The White House began to register its anger over the turn of events. Presidential Counselor Edwin Meese, said the London *Daily Telegraph* March 14, was furious at the State Department's leaks about covert action.

Next followed the now-famous incident of the Nicaraguan defector, brought to the United States to "tell all" about his training in Cuba and Ethiopia before going to fight in El Salvador. Instead, he announced on nationwide television that his "confession" had been obtained by torture at the hands of the Salvadoran government. President Reagan wondered aloud to reporters why no one had raised the possibility that the incident was a "setup."

A setup by whom, the President did not say. But

some people at the White House are trying to put the State Department on a shorter leash. National Security Adviser William Clark—like Meese, a member of the “California group” of White House officials—has since moved to seize a modicum of control over Foggy Bottom, issuing a memo stating that all new presentations of “evidence” on Central America must be cleared by the interdepartmental group on foreign policy overseen by the National Security Council.

A quiet intelligence war has broken out. Unnamed “senior administration officials” complained to the *New York Times* in mid March that they were “disappointed that intelligence agencies had refused” to make public any evidence to back up Haig’s claims about Nicaragua.

The arrest of a ring of international arms traffickers in Costa Rica announced by San José authorities March 16, in fact is the first “concrete” evidence on who runs guns to the Salvadoran insurgents—and the story it uncovers does not fit with Haig’s “facts” at all.

Seven terrorists of Argentine, Costa Rican, Salvadoran, and Nicaraguan nationality were caught with 150 M-16 automatic rifles, thousands of rounds of ammunition, grenades, bomb-making materials, and communications equipment. Several carried multiple passports. When questioned as to why they had chosen Costa Rica as the base for their gun-running into El Salvador rather than Nicaragua—which borders on El Salvador—the smugglers replied that authorities were too vigilant in Nicaragua.

Even more shocking is the report from sectors of U.S. intelligence that the American-made weapons found on the terrorists were originally issued to Israel in 1978 by the U.S. government under the Camp David accords. These sources further report that the captured group is believed to have been on the payroll of the Israeli Mossad intelligence agency.

## Eye on Mexico

Despite Reagan’s instructions to cooperate with Mexico, the Mexican government is now a target of the State Department’s demolition crew. There has been a sharp intensification of the line developed over the past two years by the circuit of U.S. Social Democrats. The line is that Mexico collaborates with leftists abroad, but at home it is a reactionary “dictatorship” that will inevitably be rocked by violence and unrest from the poor and oppressed, as have its neighbors.

U.S. ambassador to El Salvador Deane Hinton told the *Washington Post* March 17 that Mexico “should not play the lead” in forging a solution to the regional crisis, because “they are part and parcel” of the problem. The Mexican government, he charged, has allowed guerrillas to establish a “base for fundraising and propaganda activities” in Mexico. Simultaneously, the State Department’s faceless “senior officials” went into action, telling the *New York Times* that the administra-

tion accepted the Mexican proposal only because “if the mediation effort fails,” then the Mexican government will “better appreciate the threat to its security represented by Soviet and Cuban interference in Central America.”

With shooting incidents between Salvadoran, Honduran, and Nicaraguan gunboats breaking out in the Gulf of Fonseca and the Salvadoran military demanding the United States help them double troop strength to 50,000 men, time and maneuvering room for the White House and intelligence community allies to stabilize the area are running out. Shutting Haig’s mouth is just not enough.

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## Documentation

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### López Portillo discusses his mediation plan

*The following are excerpts from a New York Times interview with Mexican President José López Portillo March 10, 1982. The New York Times only published a small portion of the interview.*

**Q:** Do you believe that Nicaragua is arming itself beyond its own needs? Do you believe there is evidence of arms being sent to the Salvadoran rebels?

**A:** That Nicaragua is arming itself is a fact; it is afraid of being invaded; the United States is arming itself; the Soviet Union is arming itself . . . each one has fear of its own risks, in proportion to its power. That of Nicaragua is minimal; its resources very limited. What is happening to Nicaragua is the same thing that is happening to Cuba: all efforts to arm itself means its people are being deprived of expectations of development, and this deprives them of [necessary] living standards, which is inconvenient for each of those two countries. . . . It is a fact that cannot be denied . . . they are weak countries faced with fear, and with only one response: to arm themselves. . . .

I can tell you what the Nicaraguans told me, that they deliberately are not allowing the transport of arms. The arms can arrive, in open countries with coasts, from anywhere. They insist no, the United States declares yes; the fact is the arms arrive. They leave from somewhere.

What I would like is for us to create sufficient conditions of security such that through reciprocal agreements we would be assured that they will not continue arming themselves. How do we achieve such security? By eliminating the cause, and eliminating the cause means eliminating the fear; . . . we eliminate the fear through formal “non-aggression” pacts that would serve as the basis for stabilizing and defending the area. . . .

**Q:** What are your special concerns on relations in the near-term future?

**A:** To resolve the longer-term problem, in my way of looking at it, nothing can replace intensified North-South dialogue and global negotiations at the United Nations. That is why in my proposals in Managua, although the solution was implicit, the proposals were concrete and addressed the short term. That speech was in fact a proposal for détente. . . . I am certain that Cuba is prepared to negotiate all points of security concern for the United States. If détente between the United States and Cuba is achieved, we will have alleviated most of the Central American situation. . . . It may seem absurd, but this is a security we should give to a country which feels cornered . . . a non-aggression pact and negotiations and guarantees that its neighbors will not attack it. These are minimum assurances that a poor nation demands before it becomes desperate. If all hope is eliminated for that people, it will become desperate and a desperate people is a group of human beings ready for anything, including death. I don't believe this is the solution, eliminating Nicaragua's youth.

## Cold coup in Panama adds to regional instability

by Ricardo Ramirez

The high command of Panama's National Guard, the country's only military force and highest policy-making body, was reshuffled in early March in what amounted to a coup. Forced into sudden retirement were the Guard's commander-in-chief, Florencio Flores, and two of his top deputies.

Among their replacements are officers who have been linked to the international drug traffic and to the Italian Freemasonic Propaganda-2 lodge. The outlawed P-2 lodge, headed by Licio Gelli, was identified by the Italian government as the control center for Mediterranean and Latin American drug trafficking and terrorism.

The Panamanian government insisted that the unexpected changes in the Guard's leadership were strictly "routine." But this was belied by the statements of Socialist International adventurer Hugo Spadafora, who said that "Flores was ousted because he was too timid politically." Spadafora's comments were interpreted as referring to the Guard's relatively moderate posture toward the Central American crisis, paralleling the stance taken by Mexico.

Spadafora—a former member of the cabinet—gained wide notoriety during the Nicaraguan civil war, when he organized an "International Brigade" of guerrillas to

fight alongside the rebels. Scion of the Panamanian branch of the "black nobility" Italian family of the same surname, the Libyan-trained Spadafora is now organizing similar "brigades" for El Salvador and elsewhere.

### More radical stance

One possible outcome of the coup is that the Guard's new high command may now adopt a more radical stance toward Central America. In the early days of the conflict in El Salvador, former Panamanian strongman Omar Torrijos had initiated talks with all the warring factions in an attempt to mediate the conflict. He had also begun to link his peace-making efforts with those of Mexico's President, José López Portillo, and with Ecuador's Jaime Roldos.

This earned Torrijos the enmity of the Jesuits and other radicals—both of the "right" and "left" varieties—who wanted to heat up the Salvadoran war. Torrijos was killed in an "airplane accident" in July of last year, a few weeks after Ecuador's Roldos was also killed in the same manner.

The coup in Panama will likely bring about the shift in policy that was not fully achieved with Torrijos's assassination.

After Torrijos's removal, the Panamanian government continued its mediation attempts. In October 1981, President Aristides Royo offered his services as a go-between to U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig, and in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly. More recently, Panama has lent its support to López Portillo's peace proposals for Central America.

There have been persistent indications that Panama's cooperation with Mexico to bring an end to the genocidal bloodshed in Central America provoked the ire of the war-mongering circles around Haig. In mid-February, for example, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick, a "right-wing" Social Democrat, denied that either Panama or Mexico were "democratic nations," and left the distinct impression that both nations could expect reprisals.

### Drugs and P-2

The new head of the National Guard is Rubén Darío Paredes, but it is believed that the real power lies with associates of the new vice-chief of staff, Col. Manuel Noriega, which include Torrijos's cousin and heir-apparent, Col. Roberto Díaz Herrera.

Noriega's name has surfaced in investigations of the drug traffic that goes through Panama, report officials of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. As head of intelligence during the almost 13 years that Torrijos ruled, Noriega oversaw the forging of the South American "connection" to Panama's traditional role as a transshipment point for drugs on their way from the Orient to the West.