

# U.S. Senate resolution against Panama condemned by Ibero-America

by D.E. Pettingell

The U.S. Senate adopted a resolution Sept. 24 calling for a total economic boycott against the Republic of Panama if a "non-military transitional government" is not in place within 45 days. The call to overthrow the constitutional government of Panama, has the potential to lead already tense U.S./Ibero-American relations into a political crisis more serious than that triggered by U.S. support for the British against Argentina in the Malvinas War of 1982.

The Latin American Parliament led the condemnation of this latest attack by issuing a strongly worded political statement Sept. 30. "We reject as incompatible with non-intervention and the self-determination of peoples the pretensions of the U.S. government or of any other government to involve itself in the internal political affairs of Panama and threaten with unilateral and unacceptable ultimatums and measures with the end of dictating the conduct of the government of Panama." Similar responses were heard from other quarters in Ibero-America.

The Senate resolution, adopted as an amendment to the Department of Defense authorization bill, calls for the United States to "cease all economic and military assistance . . . suspend all shipments of military equipment and spare parts . . . prohibit the importation of sugars, syrups, or molasses" unless "(1) the Government of Panama has demonstrated substantial progress in the effort to assure civilian control of the armed forces and that the Panama Defense Forces and its leaders have been removed from nonmilitary activities and institutions; (2) the government of Panama has established an independent investigation into allegations of illegal actions by members of the Panama Defense Forces; (3) a non-military transitional government is in power, and (4) freedom of the press . . . [is] restored."

The resolution was sponsored by Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), chairman of the Western Hemispheric Affairs subcommittee, along with Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), David Durenburger (R-Minn.), Alfonso D'Amato (R-N.Y.), and John Kerry (D-Mass.). It gained immediate bipartisan support, with Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) voicing his disappointment "that the Senator from Connecticut did not offer a mandatory cut-off."

The move by the Senate, cheered by the State Department, represents only the latest step in the campaign against the Ibero-American armed forces in general and Gen. Manuel A. Noriega, head of the Panama Defense Forces, in particular. The policy of weakening the institution of the armed forces throughout the continent has been voiced loud and clear by Elliott Abrams, the undersecretary of state for inter-American affairs, leaving those nations defenseless in the face of Soviet-backed narco-terrorism.

## Warnings from Panama

On Sept. 30, Panama's national legislative assembly passed a resolution denouncing U.S. intervention in Panama's internal affairs. This followed by less than a week the very strong denunciation issued by President Eric Delvalle and his cabinet Sept. 24, in which they said, "We believe the time has come to warn that the Panamanian government will not tolerate any more actions of intervention and disrespect, that it is ready to firmly maintain its national dignity at any cost, and that it will undertake the defense of its national sovereignty as demanded by circumstances."

The Sept. 30 legislative assembly resolution said, "The United States government, ignoring the most basic principles of relations among nations . . . has been harassing and threatening the people and government of Panama, and intervening shamelessly in the internal affairs of our constitutional government to install a puppet government subject to the dictates emanating from Washington . . . [American officials in Panama] in an arrogant, haughty manner and with the greatest petulance, follow the instructions of their government, and they themselves participate in marches and demonstrations that have as their sole purpose the destabilization of public institutions to create conditions propitious to implement their dark intentions. . . . The provocation and intervention of the North Americans, in open violation of the Canal Treaties, [included] the movement of troops stationed in the Panama Canal through the City of Panama, at the same time that a helicopter was violating Panama's air space. This aggression is the consequence of the desperation of a power which desires by all means to remain the fatherland beyond the year

1999, and which insists that Panama be a pawn of these warmongering adventurers in Central America.”

### An honored general

Ibero-America's armed forces are aware of the strategic implications of the attacks on Noriega for the rest of the continent. On the occasion of the 177th anniversary celebrations of Mexican independence, Sept. 14 in Mexico City, General Noriega was the special honored military guest, among military officers from across Ibero-America.

Noriega was personally congratulated by each of his Ibero-American colleagues upon receiving the Order of Military Merit, Mexico's highest military honor, from President de la Madrid. The medal was given in explicit recognition of Noriega's outstanding role in fighting for peace in Central America. Noriega has advocated a military role in the peace process attempted by the Contadora Group nations (Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Panama), and attempted to persuade the United States to remove the conflict from the East-West framework in which the Reagan administration has attempted to place it.

Noriega's position on how peace and political stability are to be achieved in Central America is perhaps the main reason that the Reagan administration wants to get rid of him.

### Black propaganda

The Reagan administration, the CIA, the U.S. Congress, and the media have thrown everything at Noriega, accusing him of everything from drug-trafficking to killing opposition leaders. The latest they have cooked up are grand jury investigations.

The *Miami Herald* gave banner headlines Sept. 17 to the testimony of a Panamanian pilot who told federal authorities that he had personally flown cocaine shipments from Central America to the United States under General Noriega's orders. The paper reported that the investigation is "top secret" and that the possibility of a criminal indictment of Noriega by the United States looms. Federal prosecutors in Miami are aware that an investigation of Noriega can be "used politically" to depose him, the *Miami* daily wrote.

In addition to this particular investigation, the *Los Angeles Times* reported Aug. 4 that Noriega is also the subject of a grand jury probe in Tampa. The charges are drug-related as well. The *Times*, however, reports that there are "problems" with corroborating the information provided by "sources." Although both papers talked about a "possible indictment," they admit that the goal is ultimately political. "The ultimate decision on whether to indict would be cleared through Washington," as the *Herald* put it.

Such investigations of Noriega have been rumored since 1984, but not a shred of evidence against him has ever been produced. Rather, the "leaks" on the investigations have been fueling a massive black propaganda campaign. The Panama Defense Forces' role in cracking down on drug smuggling

and money laundering, and assisting the Drug Enforcement Administration in capturing drug traffickers, has not been found newsworthy.

Noriega's contribution to the war on drugs was even acknowledged by the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics Matters. In a recently released mid-year progress report, State praised cocaine interdiction as the "biggest in Panama's history."

During the Senate debate on the anti-Panama resolution Sept. 24, Senator Durenburger found it necessary to attempt to discredit Noriega's strong role in the war on drugs, saying that was merely "playing a game of occasional cooperation." "If this government has learned anything about dealing with change in the Third World, it should have learned that we cannot continue to support, implicitly or explicitly, brutal and corrupt dictators who oppress their people," he said.

The Panamanian daily *Crítica* reported Sept. 24 that "enemy forces"—U.S. troops—were redeployed from the Canal Zone to the U.S. embassy in Panama City, in violation of U.S.-Panama treaties. Panama's foreign minister, Jorge Abadia, protested the redeployment before the U.N. General Assembly the same day. The State Department acknowledged on Sept. 25 that there had been a movement of troops, but that they were "not armed," although they "were in uniform" for a "routine courtesy call at the embassy."

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