

Noriega: 'Bush responsible for any harm that befalls me'

by Carlos Wesley

"I am in good health. If anything happens to me, a strange disease or an accident while I am on American territory, I hold Mr. George Herbert Walker Bush responsible and I call as my witnesses the people of America and the world." So said Panamanian Gen. Manuel Noriega at the hearing on July 10 in Miami, Florida, where U.S. federal district Judge William Hoeveler sentenced him to 40 years in prison on his conviction on drug-trafficking charges.

Noriega, in full-dress military uniform, addressed the court in Spanish for some two and a half hours.

"The real purpose of this procedure is not to sentence me. It is to legitimize the power of this administration to take any measure to achieve its political goals, even if it includes the death of innocent persons." The Panamanian general added: "Any leader or head of state who does not obey the whims of the establishment may find himself converted into a delinquent, if he acts against the established interests."

Defiantly, Noriega explained why he never accepted a plea bargain deal with the U.S. government: "If the world had read that [plea bargain] document, they would feel the disgust that I felt at that moment. And I do not regret having rejected that human miserliness, nor that I am suffering the consequences myself, because I don't carry on my conscience the weight of having sold out my country, which is called Panama, for materialist proposals. If that is the price that I am paying in exchange for my freedom, my dignity, and my loyalty to the nation that saw me born, then it is a small price indeed!"

Noriega's capture by U.S. forces which invaded Panama on Dec. 20, 1989 marked the first application of the Thornburgh Doctrine, which was recently upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court under Chief Justice William Rehnquist. Under it, the United States unilaterally claims the "right" to

kidnap foreign citizens abroad.

Since the United States established the precedent with the invasion of Panama and the kidnaping of Noriega, with virtually no protest from the governments of Ibero-America at the time, it has gone on a rampage, promoting the kidnaping of presumed transgressors all over the continent. The most recent victim is Maj. Edgardo López Grimaldo, a former spokesman for the Panamanian Defense Forces and aide to Noriega, imprisoned in Colombia with the aim of extradicting him to Panama on political charges, and possibly from there to the United States, to testify against Noriega in future proceedings.

Noriega only the first

López, who was picked up in Colombia by Interpol agents attached to the Colombian DAS security service a few weeks ago, is gravely ill and requires urgent medical treatment by a specialist. His attorneys are demanding his release from the La Picota prison in Bogotá, and that Colombia grant him political asylum and reject the extradition request from Panama as a political ploy by the United States. As one of his attorneys told *EIR*, the way his case is handled "will determine whether Colombia will apply its new Constitution or whether it prefers to apply the thesis of the U.S. Supreme Court."

The Supreme Court decision continues to draw protests all over Ibero-America. The Presidents of six South American countries—Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay—joined in the past few weeks to ask the Organization of American States (OAS) Inter-American Juridical Committee to rule on the legality of the kidnaping decision. The Mexican government is also exploring placing the issue on the agenda of one or more commissions of the United Nations.

In Miami, Noriega, the first victim of an official kidnapping by the U.S. government, charged Bush with "influencing and subverting the American judicial system." Noriega accused Bush of "genocide against the people of Panama by giving the order to massively bombard Panama's civilian population, causing the death of more than 5,000 inhabitants," using experimental weapons "such as the Stealth fighter-bomber, cluster bombs with flechettes, and special flame-throwers."

Noriega said he was "demonized" by "a psy-war apparatus superior to that of Goebbels in Hitler's Nazi Germany."

Why, asked Noriega, did the Panamanian people recently welcome the U.S. President with tear gas, and force him to run out of town under armed guard, "after he liberated them from a 'monstrous dictator,' in a demagogic 'Just Cause'?" Noting that "being the world's policeman is a very expensive profession," Noriega asked: "How many homeless and unemployed in Los Angeles, New York, and Miami could have been helped" with the millions spent to "Get Noriega"?

Noriega told Judge Hoeveler: "You have been used by the government. By refusing to allow any challenge to your government's policy actions, you have become an ally of these policies."

Hoeveler joined prosecution

During the seven-month trial, Hoeveler forbade the defense to mention the invasion or present any "political" evidence, including information about the drugs-for-arms operations carried out by White House operatives in Central America. The judge's gag order preordained Noriega's conviction. Even at the sentencing, Hoeveler upheld prosecutors' objections and forbade Noriega to talk about some U.S. covert operations.

According to Noriega, Hoeveler also barred the defense from introducing evidence about anything related to the Iran hostage crisis, the accounts at the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), and U.S. attempts "to eliminate the Shah of Iran in Panama, using Panamanian medical doctors, to obtain the release of the American hostages." Also at issue, he said, was the "mysterious" death of Noriega's predecessor, Panamanian leader Gen. Omar Torrijos, in an airplane blown up "by a task force of the U.S. Southern Command by orders of the Reagan-Bush administration."

Col. Julián Melo, who was cited repeatedly by the prosecutors as the man who allegedly delivered the payoffs from the drug cartels to Noriega, was never called to testify, despite the fact that "the prosecutors had Melo housed three times at the Embassy Suites of Miami. Why was he not called to testify? Because Melo's version would have exonerated me."

Hoeveler's protestations that "politics was not part of this case" were belied by the plea-bargain deals given to prosecution witnesses. Hoeveler sentenced Amet Paredes to three years in jail and a \$50 fine, although he was caught with a yacht-load of cocaine and weapons that could have

earned him 20 years in prison. Prosecutor Myles Malman said that Paredes was forced to turn to crime because Noriega reneged on an agreement to back his father, Gen. Rubén Darío Paredes, for President of Panama. The elder Paredes acknowledged his intimate ties to the Ochoa drug lord family in 1986. In fact, the Medellín Cartel killed another son, Rubén Darío Paredes, Jr., for losing a cocaine shipment.

Hoeveler also praised Ricardo Bilonick, whom he sentenced to four years in jail, after Bilonick admitted he smuggled 22 tons of cocaine into the United States. At his sentencing June 17, Bilonick read letters on his behalf from former President Jimmy Carter and former U.S. ambassador to Panama Ambler Moss.

Military figures ally against the U.S.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision confirming the U.S. status as an outlaw nation, has moved Ibero-America's military to draw the appropriate lessons from the invasion of Panama and the Noriega trial. "The U.S. Supreme Court decision of last June 15," commented the July issue of *Ombro a Ombro*, the publication of Brazil's retired military, "authorizes the U.S. Executive to henceforth repeat, as often as it considers it necessary, the sort of actions carried out in Panama in December 1989." The court decision must be analyzed side by side with the Pentagon's so-called Wolfowitz Doctrine, which states that the United States must do whatever it takes "to guarantee that it will remain the only military superpower," said *Ombro a Ombro*.

The "arrogant Supreme Court decision is only comparable to the most decadent moments of the Roman caesars; it does not demonstrate strength, but profound cowardice and weakness at a time when one can see looming on the horizon the worst political-institutional crisis in U.S. history, as shown by the ongoing U.S. electoral process. The message of the new Neros is clear: the tiger is wounded, and before it dies, it is preparing to set fire to the international juridical order," said the editorial, which is believed to reflect the views of active duty military and political layers in Brazil and throughout Ibero-America.

U.S. diplomacy is now "working night and day to dismantle the armed forces of the nations to the south of the Rio Grande, so that future interventions such as the one in Panama are 'cleaner,' " added *Ombro a Ombro*. "The time is coming to establish hemispheric security accords between the sovereign nations of our continent, apart from, and even against those that place themselves above the most precious principles of civilized behavior among nations. If the Monroe Doctrine in its beginnings showed the determination of the young American republic to confront the interventionist threats of the Holy Alliance, today the sovereign republics below the Rio Grande can invoke the same principles to confront those who, from within the North American nation itself, betray their own republican principles of the harmony of interest among nations."