

History will record: 'I spoke the truth'

The following excerpts are from the speech prepared in Spanish by Gen. Manuel Noriega of Panama for delivery at his sentencing hearing before Judge William Hoeveler in federal district court in Miami, Florida on July 10.

. . . I will not be making a speech, nor providing an explanation; just making a limited exposition of things and facts that give the sense, the smell of this case that go beyond a reasonable doubt. . . .

It is easy to determine wrongdoing when it is perpetrated by criminals. We expect it from them and we anticipate their conduct. But when good men are used for evil purposes, no one wants to believe it. However, the greatest crimes are often committed by decent men acting with a noble purpose.

I need look no further for my proof, than your recent examination of the jury. There is no way to reconcile what the jurors told the press, with what they told this court. And I have no doubt that the jurors really told the press that there was a prayer session at the Everglades Hotel. But in court, they denied that such a prayer session took place. Your honor, I am sure that you don't believe that the press manufactured this incident. But you believed the jurors, because you are incapable of believing that the jury could lie to you. But you know that at least one member of the jury lied to you before. Similarly, you always believed them, that they never heard the news, nor commented on the case, nor watched television. It is possible that the jury was forced to lie to you by the hidden arm, by the Chinese Wall that always came up at decisive moments. . . .

It is said that those who don't learn the lessons of history, are condemned to repeat them. The problem is that no one wants to learn the lessons of history and I was one of those (*mea culpa*). For thousands of years, powerful nations have staged provocations to start wars or to persecute leaders who are obstacles to their purposes. I forgot that and fell for the provocation of the United States' harassment on my own territory, and once one falls into this provocation, comes the frenzy in the news in the name of American justice.

That's how you Americans clamored for justice after hearing the fairy tale of your warships coming under attack in the Gulf of Tonkin. That's how you Americans clamored for justice against Spain when your warship, the *Maine*, sank in the harbor of Havana. And that's how, more recently, you Americans clamored for justice after hearing the story that Iraqi soldiers were murdering babies in Kuwait. Only after all of these events, you found out that your leaders had manipulated the facts for

political aims. It was the same in Panama. . . .

Judge Hoeveler, Panama was not invaded because the canal was threatened. Panama was not invaded because the lives of American citizens were in danger. Panama was invaded because I was an *obstacle* and *injurious* to the historical records of your President, George Bush, who preferred me dead!

The real purpose of these proceedings 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.

Used by your government

Unfortunately, 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.

You accepted your government's arguments, that its war in Panama was necessary to protect American lives. You accepted the argument, because you cannot conceive that your Army could have caused the deaths of innocent people merely to discredit me and for the political purposes of this administration. . . .

Your honor, for six months you have heard talk about Panama. You don't know Panama! But the way the prosecutors talked about it and its authorities, was with the same impositions and demands that one speaks about the duties of an American colony such as Guam or the Virgin Islands. . . . The Army of the Isthmus of Panama fought in the War of Independence from Spain on the side of Bolívar and Sucre in the battles of Junín and Ayacucho. That is to say, that Panama is not a colony of the United States. It never was, nor ever will be a star in the flag of the United States, and its officials cannot abide by the orders of their masters, the chiefs of a colony. . . .

The [Panamanian] Defense Forces were referred to here as something strange. But its organization was a professional counterpart to the American military brigade on the Canal Zone. . . .

But when I assumed command, the Reagan-Bush administration confused my friendship and my professional coordination, with submission, dependency, and subservience. And when they attempted to go against the interests of my fatherland, I didn't accept it. . . . And that's how the war against General Noriega developed.

Yes, your honor, the case against Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega is completely and totally political, just as you described when you first learned of it, when you said it was "fraught with political overtones." . . . The government's Chinese Wall, the CIPAs [Classified Information Procedures Act], the permanent conferences and consultations with Washington. Those are all "political overtones" before, during, and after. . . .

The allegations of these two administrations were presented to a grand jury through José Blandón. Do you remember that name, and others, that culminated with the charges

of 1988, causing all the infamous publicity and the honors of a satanic invasion because of which I am in the belly of Leviathan? . . .

Why did the government, having Blandón and [Boris] Olarte in its custody, never call them to testify?

The answer, Your Honor, is obvious. They are two totally opposed theories. . . .

When in the history of the civilized nations of the Americas has a country been invaded, causing destruction and death, to overthrow and arrest a foreign leader fulfilling his term in office? . . .

What name can you give the action of demanding and clamoring for the rights granted by the Geneva Convention to prisoners of war for its soldiers in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, but denying others, such as myself, those same privileges and rights. . . .

The millionaire propaganda machine employed against me by the Reagan-Bush administration for nearly four years, did not allow any of the citizens of this country to escape its claws. Thus, there could be no impartial jury that did not have preconceived images about this trial. And the proof of this was expressed by one of the members—when this trial was headed for a “mistrial” because of a “deadlock” among the jurors on April 8, the day before the verdict in this political trial—who said that “George Bush is awaiting this verdict.” . . .

Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega was an obstacle to their disproportionate aims of keeping the canal and its territory, and perpetuating their military bases with the duties of an American colony.

But . . . they didn’t just want to dismantle the clauses of the treaty and for me to submit to their order, but they also wanted to impose their influence and power on other independent nations in the area. . . .

In the specific case of Nicaragua, the insulting demand of Adm. [John] Poindexter, indicted as a liar in the Iran-Contra case, which is now reaching up to the levels of true responsibility, was that a spearhead be established on Nicaraguan territory using Panamanian troops, to justify an armed intervention by the United States.

When I learned from this and other high-level envoys of this administration the true reason for its protective image, there, at that moment, I told them no! No! To permit damage to my troops and to my neighbors, I said no! To harm the Nicaraguan people, I said no! To intervene against a people in the midst of their most intimate struggles and decisions, I roundly said, no and no. And this no! is one of the reasons I find myself before you. . . .

Barred from presenting a case

Your Honor, the defense was not allowed to present among its evidence here, documents that exist in classified U.S. archives, such as: . . .

Weapons from Costa Rica, first for the Sandinistas, then for the Contras. And with the Contras, those pilots were

allowed to bring drugs from Costa Rica to the United States. In Costa Rica, their base of operation was run by John Hull, [Joseph] Fernández and others. . . .

The death of Panamanian former Sandinista [Dr. Hugo] Spadafora, after visiting the CIA in Washington and meeting with John Hull in his farm in Costa Rica. . . .

The trip to Washington in 1984, where the U.S. chose and supported [Nicolás Ardito] Barletta as the presidential candidate against Arnulfo Arias. . . .

Reports from intelligence agencies that state explicitly that they have no proof of drug trafficking against General Noriega. . . .

Why was it not allowed to expand about Grenada? . . .

Why was it not allowed to speak about the meetings with former CIA director [William] Casey in my home in Altos del Golf, and in Washington and in Fort Amador and in other clandestine sites? . . .

Of the mysterious trip to Cuba, it was not allowed to be said that it included a request for a visit there by a high-level official from the Reagan-Bush administration, who, following my visit, went to Cuba to open a channel for talks. But the administration does not want this known because it will upset the Cuban exiles, and it was not allowed that the name of the senior official of the Reagan-Bush administration, who was sent by Reagan-Bush and received by Castro, be mentioned here. . . .

For my part, I accuse George Herbert Walker Bush of:

1) Using his power and authority to influence and subvert the American judicial system to condemn me.

2) Of genocide, for having given the order to massively bombard Panama’s civilian population, causing the deaths of more than 5,000 inhabitants. . . .

7) I accuse him of planning the destruction of Panama’s sovereignty, and of Panama’s Defense Forces. . . .

8) Of creating crisis for those governments of Latin America that are not aligned with his demagogic “new order” policy.

9) Of sabotaging the tripartite accord with Japan for the construction of a new canal through Panama. . . .

11) Of being the intellectual author and conspirator in the sabotage against American civilian installations in the Panama Canal zone that began on Oct. 31, 1976.

Of all this and more, he is guilty. . . .

To Panamanians . . . remember: there is no armed invasion that can kill an idea. There is no sentence that can silence the Panamanian cry of liberation, for a single territory, for a single flag, without foreign troops.

However, Panamanians: empires as the Babylonian and the Roman fall as the Berlin Wall, and only God is the owner of eternity. . . .

I praise God because He protects my family as they wander the earth living in exile, because He is my shepherd. I am at peace with myself. In time, history will . . . record that on this day I spoke the truth.