

A TALK WITH MANUEL NORIEGA

Oliver Stone

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The 1989 invasion of Panama and the capture of Gen. Manuel Noriega marked a bizarre moment between the end of cold war Realpolitik and the beginning of new-world-order fantasy. Other U.S. interventions during the Reagan/Bush years were devised to roll back what might be perceived—even at an aching stretch—as Soviet power in foreign lands. Grenada, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Afghanistan: Washington’s rationale for the money, the massacres, and the military deployments was essentially the same as it had been for forty years.

Bush’s putsch into Panama had a somewhat different odor. No one ever said definitively why we were there, but the reigning reason always seemed to be drugs. Someone had the idea that Noriega had become the paramount drug “kingpin,” on a par with the leaders of the Colombia cartels, just a heartbeat away from selling crack to little kids in American schoolyards. (That made it an important, early example of the exploitation of children for political purposes and their protection by the state as the primary goal of public policy.) The proximate cause of the hunt for Noriega was his 1988 indictment, by Federal grand juries in southern Florida, for facilitating the flow of drugs from Colombia through Panama, a charge made before the grand jury by one of his closest aides, Jose Blandon, who turned against him in return for legal protection and untold riches. By the way, the drug tide seems to have been utterly unaffected by Noriega’s apprehension.

The plot in which Noriega plays the leading role is so dense and deep that it could easily take Oliver Stone another trilogy of films simply to skim the surface, if he had the inclination. Stone spent part of a day in prison with Noriega not long ago in pursuit of material for a film he is planning about the peculiar prisoner, and which he described on Charlie Rose as a political “satire” in the Stanley Kubrick mode. The interview is thus by a filmmaker, not an investigative reporter, and except in two places, we have not flagged in the text arguable deviations from the historical record—a checkered one indeed.

Noriega’s contacts with U.S. intelligence services and the military go back many decades and cover so many conspiracies, scandals, covert actions, and

unsolved mysteries that only a satirist's eye could make the story credible. He may have been picked out by the C.I.A. as a nemesis (and possible successor) to Gen. Omar Torrijos, a problematic populist-nationalist who negotiated the giveback of the Panama Canal from Jimmy Carter and then was killed (along with everybody else) when his plane exploded in midair in 1981. How convenient!

Noriega was up to his ears in Iran/contra and other scandal "gates" that involved the triangular trade of U.S., Israeli, and Middle Eastern interests. He met with George Bush on two occasions and with several others in the White House entourage. According to journalists and government officials, he facilitated narcotrafficking for the Colombian cartels. He spied on Fidel Castro for the United States and vice versa. He gave covert aid to the contras and discussed expanding Panama's involvement in that sordid enterprise with Oliver North. There is no end to his multiple-dealing, double-agentry, and value-free treachery. Many of the most intriguing revelations about Noriega were made in 1987 by a retired Panamanian colonel, Robert Diaz Herrera. Diaz accused Noriega of conspiring with the C.I.A. and U.S. Army in the death of Torrijos. Diaz also charged that Noriega ordered the 1985 murder of Hugo Spadafora, a prominent critic (Diaz recanted after he was imprisoned for treason).

At the end, Noriega may have angered the White House by backing off from full support of Bush's war in Nicaragua, but with so many foul deeds in play at the same time, it's hard to say what precipitated his persecution. The U.S. military in Panama was known to be nervous about his continued compliance with U.S. strategic demands. In any case, a grotesque campaign was waged against him, with loud rock music to force him from the Nunciatura (Vatican Embassy) in Panama City, ludicrous disinformation bulletins (remember the "cocaine stash" that turned out to be tamales?), the bounty on his head, the bumbling U.S. airborne soldiers—and with disastrous results from Panamanians, who were slaughtered by the hundreds, whose neighborhoods were razed, and who were once again made to kneel before the Yanqui invader.

OLIVER STONE

Metropolitan Correctional Center, Miami. Morning, November 22, 1993. I am in a conference room with Gen. Manuel Noriega, now P.O.W. #38699-079; his daughter Sandria; and a paralegal, who is interpreting. The deputy warden waits at the other end of the table. The interview lasts three hours. What follows is a con-

densation of our conversation. The general declined to be quoted regarding his legal appeal and any new evidence he may present.

As we begin the formal interview, the general is showing me a book of personal photographs and map of his country, dotted with more than a dozen U.S. military bases.

MN: It's always important to know the strategy of the United States, when there are points to view contrary to your politics. It's as Kissinger said, "You first have to create the problem in order to solve the problem," and that's what's been done with my position. From 1970 until 1988, plus six more years before that when I was a student, I was a friend of the United States. In everything related to intelligence [and] to military assistance. I fought as a Panamanian patriot, and when I opposed their point of view regarding the Panama Canal, when I began to say, "No, no" to the violation of the Canal Treaty, after twenty-four years of friendship suddenly I become a devil. They needed to create a devil in order to get rid of the devil. That's what happened.

OS: Is this your mother?

MN: (peruses the pictures): I never met her. She died when I was very young.

OS: And your father? . . . He was an alcoholic?

MN: No. No! Who said? My father never touched a drop of alcohol.

OS: Why did he ignore you?

MN: He didn't ignore me. . . . I didn't live with him, but I've carried his name since I was born. And he provided support from the moment I was born.

OS: But you lived with an aunt?

MN: No, with—yes, with an aunt, yes.

OS: Because your father couldn't support you?

MN: No, no, no. My father could. But when my mother died she gave me to my aunt so she would raise me. And she raised me. My father always respected my mother's final wishes.

(He points to the map.) These are the American bases from the Atlantic to the Pacific. So the struggle is for permanent stay of the United States on Panamanian territory. They want to control strategic territory. This is where they intercept all the codes and phone calls toward the south, toward Patagonia. It was here that during the Falklands War all the Argentine war plans were detected, and this is where the United States can exert control over the Caribbean, Cuba. Panama is unique. So that was the struggle, when they didn't want to comply with the treaty. In other words, it was a nationalist struggle that

lasted twenty-four hours. Then they wanted concessions, bases, military bases. And I was opposed because it wasn't legal within the Torrijos-Carter Treaty. And that's why my position was so unyielding.

This (pointing to a picture of himself jogging) speaks a thousands words—a man who worked twenty-four hours a day. From Monday to Friday, I'd get up at 5 in the morning and I'd run with my instructor. I think you met him; he was Chinese.

OS: Yes, Chu Yee. But I hear you drank a lot? You drank Old Parr?

MN: Saturday and Sunday, yes. At home.

OS: No, people say you drank a lot—two bottles of Scotch a night.

MN: Nobody who drinks two bottles—

OS: (looking at photograph): That's Caspar Weinberger . . . Caspar the Ghost.

MN: Close friend . . . Bush pardoned him. Irangate problem and Mr. Bush . . . (trails off)

OS: I'd like to talk about that. . . . Is that the Shah of Iran's wife water-skiing?

MN: (laughing): Yes, yes. You have the eyes of a hawk. Without—

INTERPRETER: Without a bra [laughter].

MN: I helped them solve their problem with the Shah. When the Shah didn't have anyplace to go, no country wanted to help him. . . . This is me in Sweden.

OS: I heard it cost him a lot of money, too. It seems to me that many of your present difficulties began when the United States, when Poindexter, Reagan, Bush, Elliott Abrams, Oliver North—these people put pressure on you to participate in la guerra contra los Sandinistas. I would like you to describe as much as you can about that period and your impressions, your participation in the war.

MN: Well, when the contras had failed in their program of sabotage against the Sandinista government, the United States thought that Panama could be a support. First they requested several places in Panama for training and provisioning. I said no.

OS: Was this in the meeting with National Security Adviser Poindexter in '85?

MN: No, before. Poindexter came later. He said he was coming on Reagan and Shultz's behalf. In that meeting he didn't say "please." He ordered me. He said, "Panama must go against Nicaragua. Panama must get out of the Contadora Group." We had a strong argument, then Poindexter left, and he made a threat: From here to December 1985, if President [Nicolas Ardito] Barletta [fired as President of Panama] isn't back in his old position and you don't help in this war then you are going to see the consequences. And he left.

OS: Jose Bandon described a meeting to me where you were with Oliver

North and he was saying that there were 20,000 contras and either Jose or you said, "Colonel North, they're not an army, they are joke." North thought they could attack and win from the Southern Front [Costa Rica], but they didn't have leadership, so you were asked to train the leaders—

MN: There were three stages. The first when they asked for training bases. Then when Poindexter came, and later when Oliver North invited me to meet him in London [September 1986], at the Victoria Hotel. North was coming from Israel. He was with Secord and another general. The contras' problems were very bad. And there was the Iran problem. Then he asked me for the last time. And I explained to him, "You're defeated."

OS: North asked specifically for what, though?

MN: They lacked the combat capability. They needed trained men. The United States had failed with the contras, with their leaders; they were no good. They wanted us, our people, to go into Nicaragua.

MN: Is it true that in the meeting you said you would assassinate the entire leadership of the Sandinistas?

MN: Nunca.

OS: You never said that?

MN: Never; it's as we say, ridiculous. My point of view was that the Sandinistas were our friends.¹

OS: Borge and Ortega? I met them in Nicaragua—

MN: Ortega, yes, Ortega. Borge—because we had trained the Sandinistas when they fought against Somoza.

OS: But you had to play the game. You had to give the United States something.

MN: Yes, yes, yes.

OS: So what did you give them?

MN: Oh, no. I explained to them the mistake they were making. I told them they were thinking the Sandinistas were the old, ignorant armed civilians that fought against Somoza. But the Sandinistas had learned strategy from the Soviets. They had Soviet training, Soviet technology, and they were applying it. So the contras couldn't compete with them.

OS: Were the U.S.-supplied Russian arms for the contras coming through the Panama then at some point?

MN: The Americans supplied the contras, but not from Panama. Panama was too far away. They had a military base in Honduras.

OS: So what did they use Panama for? Money laundering, banks?

MN: No, no, no. Remember, the Canal Zone is United States territory. So

they could have meetings here, small-scale training, small ones. Training—not practical but theoretical.

OS: Is Jose Blandon's story accurate about Fidel Castro being angry with you for busting the Darien coke laboratory [a Medellin cartel drug base in the Panamanian jungle]?

MN: No. That's not true. Blandon was the witness that they took to Congress, and that they used for the indictment. But Blandon didn't testify. He didn't ratify his accusations.

OS: But in the past few years, you know, the Castro connection to the drug trade seems to have been proved. As has the Sandinistas' involvement.

MN: It's very confusing. I would suggest that you look for more information. They don't have any proof.

OS: Castro shot his top military guy, Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa, for drug dealing in 1989. Many people think that was a way to take the blame away from—

MN: Yes, that's part of like you do in the Kennedy movie (laughs). Who killed him? The same thing. Why did he kill him?

OS: What were your personal relations with Castro?

MN: We never talked about drugs or anything. We spoke about international politics. The United States always sought me out as a special conduit to solve small problems. When they invaded Grenada they make mistakes, and they were attacking a military position, but behind it was a dormitory of American students, so they asked Castro not to fight.

OS: So you called Castro to make sure these students were protected?

MN: Yes, I called Castro, telling him the United States wanted the Cubans not to return fire. That they didn't want any of the students killed. The call was Bush, Mr. Casey, and me on one phone and on another phone was me with Castro.

OS: Did you ever discuss the John Kennedy assassination with Castro?

MN: He had been sorry about it. He said, "Of course, the C.I.A."

OS: What do you think?

MN: That the large economic interests of petroleum and all that [were involved]. Kennedy's liberal policies weren't advantageous to them.

OS: We know oil is big in this world and in comparison, the drug trade is not as big as oil, but you must be aware that the Medellin cartel was very powerful in Latin America in the early 1980s, and they must have contacted you at some point? Pablo Escobar came to Panama in 1984.

MN: The D.E.A. [Drug Enforcement Administration] worked in Panama full time. I never, never, never met Escobar, ever. I was never in Medellin. When I

went to Colombia, I'd be invited officially by the government, the army. I didn't go in a clandestine way. I'd go normally, with bodyguards. And there were signed agreements for a joint U.S./Panama fight against drugs. We hit the Medellin cartel hard. We confiscated banks. We destroyed their product. Boy, did we ever confiscate money from them.

OS: Why do you think the problem is continuing in Panama?

MN: The problem will continue because it's the law of supply and demand at work. While the United States had a demand, there will be a supply in the Andean countries.

OS: Did you give permission to Escobar to enter the country?

MN: I had a very high position to be dealing with who entered and who left the country. Escobar went to Washington, too, took a picture in front of the White House with his children.

OS: What was your relationship with Hugo Spadafora [a doctor and romantic revolutionary figure in Panamanian politics]?

MN: Well, he, Eden Pastora, myself—we were all friends. Afterward Hugo had a fight with Pastora. Hugo had a fight with the Sandinistas, and Hugo began to work with the people who transported arms, with the drug-arms group that would take arms and bring back drugs from Costa Rica. In Costa Rica there is a large airport that they built and used to support the contras. Hugo was working alone. He didn't fight anymore. He had dedicated himself to getting arms. Commercial.

OS: Are you saying that Hugo was involved in the drug trade with the contras?

MN: There's a connection, which came out in the trial a little. An arms shipment gets lost. Hugo has to deliver them. Then—

OS: So you think that he was not killed by the P.D.F. [Panamanian Defense Force]?

MN: Do you know Fernandez in Costa Rica? Do you know a Dulce? John Dulce?

OS: John Hull, you mean?

MN: John Hull and Joe Fernandez [former C.I.A. station chief in Costa Rica]. In Costa Rica they were his contact in the job of helping the contras.

OS: So you think that Hull and Fernandez were responsible for his death? And the torture?

MN: No. They were the brains of the operation. The people that killed him, killed him because they were paid to.²

OS: The C.I.A and the U.S. Army have admitted paying you \$322,000 over thirty-one years—is that about right?

MN: Not much, huh? (laughs)

OS: Is that about right? Muy poco. So not yes or no.

MN: That's what they wrote down.

OS: That's what they wrote down. You received more? [laughs].

MN: That's their books.

OS: Did you spy on the American military, diplomats, or government officials in Panama? To protect yourself?

MN: To protect myself, no. In every military system of every country in the world, including the Vatican, espionage between nations of the world, spying, it's a case of self-defense. So Panamanian espionage is for the defense of Panama. It was more like counterintelligence.

OS: But everyone says you had many sapos [informants], friends in the C.I.A., people like Nestor Sanchez who tell you things. I get the impression that you have many friends and enemies in the American government. And you have people who were telling you that maybe you were in trouble with the American press.

MN: Yes. It's just that my relationship, my main relationship, was with the Central Intelligence Agency and the Army. So then I had no relationship with the political part—there was an imbalance.

OS: There you are in 1988. You have Vice President Bush running for office. He's making the war on drugs a big issue. Is there somebody in the agency who tells you to be careful? Oliver North, somebody like this? That the press in America is attacking you? What John Kerry is doing and Jesse Helms and the indictment in Miami—all this is in progress. Do you have friends who tell you—

MN: Well, all that was public.

OS: Yes, but with all this pressure I don't understand; why do you renege—do you know the word “renege”?—on the deal you made with Roberto Diaz Herrera? I don't know what happened, but I'm told you had promised Diaz that he would be an ambassador in—I don't know—Japan, Taiwan. But then you changed the deal, and Diaz got very angry and went public with many accusations that were very damaging.

MN: Yes, they were damaging, but it's not true. Diaz was retired.

OS: He was retired?

MN: Yes, I ordered it. I ordered him to leave. Because of his mental capacity, he became very difficult. Yes, he was not a mentally sane person at the time. And there was never any promise about him going to Japan. He wanted to go to Japan, but there was never any promise on my part.

OS: Did you see it coming that he would go on television and make those charges?

MN: Well, that was madness on his part. His madness. Because a reasoning and normal person wouldn't have done it.

OS: So, in hindsight, if you could do it again, if you could go back in time, what would you have done with Diaz?

MN: I'd have him arrested. I'd leave him in jail.

OS: On what charge?

MN: On the charges of lying. Also of going against the state. He hurt the country of Panama.

OS: You did say that you had Bush "by the balls." That you had information.

MN: A lot of those things were exaggerations by the press. Since there was a fight between us, they would say things.

OS: Are you aware of the new book coming out by Billy St. Malo? In the book he says that in 1987 he and Michael Kozak [a State Department official] was in the middle trying to make a deal between you and the Americans to get you out of Panama. He says, interestingly, that Reagan and Shultz wanted to make a deal but that Bush and Baker did not want to make the deal because Bush was running for President. He did not want to be perceived as being "soft on drugs." And at the last time it was Bush and Baker that subverted the potential agreement.

MN: Bush didn't carry any weight. The one who carried all the weight was Reagan. But let me say this: First, if I had been guilty on charges of drug trafficking brought by the U.S. Attorney in Miami they wouldn't have wanted to make a deal with me. Second, I didn't accept their offer because a group from the military staff told me not to accept it.

OS: Why? What was it?

MN: It was an insult to Panama. Because the United States was setting conditions. The conditions were that I leave the country but before leaving that I hand over the government to the opposition, that I eliminate the trade unions and the P.R.D. [Democratic Revolutionary Party], the parties, a series of conditions. That we eliminate the courts of justice. So that they could change the whole government.

I made the decision not to accept it. There was the sovereignty of my country. And it was violating my right as a Panamanian. It was blackmail. They were telling me to leave. How much money do you want? Do you want to be decorated? How many friends do you want to take with you? We'll send you to Spain. Go. So that's blackmail. They were doing the same thing they did to Duvalier.

OS: So in negotiating this agreement, were you buying time?

MN: Negotiate? I heard them out. I wanted to see what the points were to be able to see what the—I had my lawyers in Panama and the politicians to discuss it with them.

OS: O.K., but you did say some things about Bush after you were arrested. You were very angry with Bush.

MN: Whatever I said was not important. But I didn't make any strong or damaging statements against Bush.

OS: Didn't you make some reference to having documents or audio or video or your meetings with Poindexter, North, Abrams?

SANDRA: You told CNN that you had proof that he had met with you.

MN: Well, it's one thing to meet—

OS: In your meetings with Poindexter or North, did you tape the meetings?

MN: No, tape, no. I fight cleanly.

OS: So you have no bad feelings about Bush? About the invasion?

MN: Not today, not today. I forgave him as a Christian.

OS: You are a Catholic?

MN: Yes, I am a Christian.

OS: I thought Buddhist.

MN: I have some understanding of it because I went to Japan. . . . They invited me to the temples and I learned about the philosophy of the Soka Gai Nishen Reshoshu, an international organization that seeks world peace.

OS: You know Oliver North might be a senator in Virginia next year. Good chance. [Noriega laughs.] You laugh. Do you ever talk to him?

MN: No, no, no.

OS: He won't talk to you. He doesn't like you anymore?

MN: We were never friends.

OS: Never friends?

MN: In life and in politics there is no friendship. There is only convenience, political or friendly. But friends? The Mexicans have a saying that goes like this, "Friends—"

SANDRA: Dad—oh, my God.

MN: "My balls are friends and when I run, they bump into each other."

OS: (laughs): When you said recently that "the last chapter in the Noriega story has not been written," what realistically do you see for your future?

MN: I learned that life is in God's hands. You're here now and you can go out, and find you won the lottery, a new contract or an event that you didn't expect.

Who did it? You didn't plan it. You didn't see it coming. There is a higher power that's God which places things in your path.

OS: God loves you?

MN: Eh . . . God. Yes, God protected my life. There were ten thousand American soldiers looking for me in Panama. With my picture. House to house.

SANDRA: And civilians promised a million dollars.

MN: I survived. Ten thousand! And who did it? God.

OS: If you had had to have left Panama, which country would you have picked?

MN: If I had to? Ah . . . Eh . . . [laughs.] There were so many, so many . . .

OS: Japan? [laughs].

MN: China.

OS: China or Taiwan?

MN: Taiwan. No, I don't know China.

OS: [laughing]: Ambassador to Taiwan. When you were in the Nunciatura during the invasion, were you scared of the Americans outside?

MN: The Americans were planning to kill me there. They were planning to storm the Nunciatura. But the moment arrives in which you are no longer afraid. You face the situation. The human organism is chemical. Chemical. They took away my weapons in the Nunciatura. They left me with no means of defending myself.

OS: Did you think you were going to stay there for a while?

MN: I thought I would, for months. The important thing is that I wasn't originally going to the Nunciatura. I was told that the Nuncio wanted to speak to me. And he sent me his car.

OS: How did the Nuncio find you?

MN: Well, I had a liaison on the outside, a person. The telephones were out, there was no communication, everything was blocked off. Remember that American troops were in control of the roads. But I had a person who could communicate, and I was in touch with that person.

OS: What were you thinking about in the Nunciatura?

MN: I was thinking about the impotence of the weak before the strong.

OS: If you were writing a movie of your life, what would be the principal theme?

MN: The main theme is the chapter about the nation, of Panama. Because that was my downfall. I was free of worry before I was head of state. And then when I became—I took the problems of Panama on me.

OS: But when you look back at your whole life, and coming from poverty you wanted to be a medical student at one point but you didn't qualify. And here you became one of the most powerful men in the region. Do you believe that you were destined?

MN: Yes, yes. Yes, yes. I believe that—it's not that I didn't qualify, it's just that the medical scholarships were only given to the rich.

OS: But so many changes in your life . . . what are the lessons you personally have learned?

MN: I have learned not to be stubborn. I have learned that you have to negotiate. That life is not all or nothing. And that it's better to submit than to defy. Confront things, confront things. I have learned that the fight for ideals carries a high cost.

OS: And certainly the Buddhist law that life is change?

MN: Yes. Scientifically speaking, life is an evolution.

OS: What music do you listen to in prison?

MN: Every kind of music.

OS: Opera?

MN: No, I don't like opera. I like Rachmaninoff.

OS: What books do you read?

MN: I like science fiction very much.

OS: Any favorites?

MN: No, whatever, whatever.

OS: How does the time pass in prison? It's a long time.

MN: I speak to God. No, that's . . . time passes . . . I look for—I read something. I look for something to invest my time in. I write.

OS: What do you write?

MN: I write about the Canal, the projections for the Canal. The mistakes of Panama. I am also a poet. A minor poet.

OS: Like Mao, Mao Ze-dong. Sometimes great poetry comes from prison.

MN: Yes. I have always written.

OS: Who is the political hero you admire most?

MN: Well, if we go into the past, Simon Bolivar; later Juan Domingo Pero; and of my people, I have many.

OS: I'm going to ask you a question again, to maybe deepen your response. What was the one thing that you believe caused the change in your relationship with the United States? When did this happen? Did Bush turn against you? And start demonizing you? Or did he warn you?

MN: What turned the United States against me was my refusal to accept their political conditions that violated the Canal Treaty. They first wanted to keep the school at Fort Gulick. They wanted an extension. And I didn't accept it. Here's a letter of General Gorman requesting that—

OS: Run this by me again, what is Gulick?

SANDRA: It was a training school, for military. It was called School of the Americas, and everybody from Latin America comes to Panama to this school to take training from the American Army. So it said in the treaty that they had to give it back to Panama in '84. But when 1984 arrived they tried to negotiate. It is very important to them to keep the Americas school because that way they were training Latin American armies.

OS: You feel that this is the main reason that the situation turned against you?

MN: That's one of them. After having said "no, no" to supporting the contras against the Sandinistas. The United States understood that Noriega is not the same man that was lieutenant colonel. Now he is commander in chief and said "no" to our interests. And he is not our man.

OS: So your theory is that America does not really want to give up the Canal? And that America wanted to destroy the P.D.F. so that there would be no Panamanian security force to protect the Canal, and that would be a reason to abrogate the treaty? That's what you think?

MN: The treaty signed by Carter indicates that Panama has to have an armed force so that the United States can turn over the defense of the Canal to Panama. That's why they destroyed the defense forces, the P.D.F., in the invasion.

OS: I've asked several American military people about this, and they say that this is not true. Because with present-day technology it is not necessary to keep American soldiers there. The Canal can be monitored with satellite technology from Florida.

MN: It's not the Canal itself. It's the strategic location. It's not in Costa Rica, not in Colombia. It's only in the Galeta Island [off Panama's Pacific coast] that the detector exists, the point of detection to all of South America and North America and the Caribbean. It is the only point in the world. They say they're not interested in the bases in Panama anymore. But they are going to demand in the year 2000 a base on the Atlantic and another base in the Pacific.

OS: So you are saying that the technology will be such that they can monitor Latin America better from Panama than from Florida, or is it psychological?

MN: No, it's specific. Listening posts, from Panama. You can't monitor from Florida.

OS: Is there anything else you would like to speak about?

MN: I understand that the nature of your profession is sensationalist. I don't seek to change what you believe. But I want to tell you that there is another truth in this situation. Not the truth that the apparatus, the establishment, hurled at me. I hope that within your professionalism, and your poetic roots, that you will find that the ones that fight for their country against injustice, run the risk of my situation. I could have died. There was a plan in place to do as they did to Maurice Bishop in Grenada. That was the plan, that I would die there. That's why when I arrived at places where they said I was hiding, they'd shoot. Because they were looking to kill me, not capture me. And since they didn't kill me, they sentenced me. As the Spanish did with the Venezuelan patriot Miranda in the nineteenth century. The Spanish took him as a captive during the wars for independence. I have all the details for you, of how the conspiracy against me was carried out [gives notes].

OS: I appreciate this. I want to tell you that I like you very much . . . and I can't paint you as a white knight either—

MN: I'm not [laughs].

After farewells and whispered partings with his daughter, the general, about five feet six inches, is walked back to his cell by two large federal guards, his gait springy and defiant as his small frame recedes across the lawn. He smiles at his guards, makes small talk.

NOTES

1. According to North's notes of the London meeting, the two discussed developing a commando training program in Panama for contras and sabotaging major economic targets in Nicaragua.
2. In *Our Man in Panama* John Dinges writes that U.S. Ambassador Everett Briggs concluded that P.D.F. personnel killed Spadafora, but Noriega's involvement could not be proved. Dinges writes that "once Noriega found out about the killing he actively participated in covering it up," and he opposed President Barletta's decision to create a commission to investigate the murder. Spadafora was inquiring about drug trafficking within the government when he was killed.