

Noriega and Communism: The Ties That Bind

By Nevin Gussack

Many political observers and politicians viewed the Noriega regime a corrupt reminder of American power and influence in Central America. Noriega's position as a CIA intelligence asset was highlighted, while his communist connections were downplayed or even omitted. The purpose of this brief book is to expose the communist and anti-American connections of the Noriega dictatorship. One can reasonably conclude that Noriega represented the worst in political opportunism and the failure of the CIA and American policymakers in their recruitment of intelligence assets. In order to comprehend the reasoning behind Noriega's pseudo-leftism and anti-Americanism, one must outline the history of the dictatorship of Brigadier Omar Torrijos. In 1968, Brigadier Omar Torrijos seized power in a *coup d'état* and implemented a leftwing nationalist dictatorship in Panama. Various elements of the communist People's Party of Panama (PDP) were welcomed into the Torrijos government. Close diplomatic and political relations with the USSR and Cuba were opened. In October 1973, Torrijos passed a law which created the DIGEDCOM, which in turn gave birth to the *Juntas Comunales*. The *Juntas Comunales* were manned by cadres of the People's Party.¹ The new ruling party of the Torrijos dictatorship was known as the Democratic Revolutionary Party of Panama (PRD). During this period, the United States maintained a close trading partnership with Panama. In fact, the liberal Carter Administration agreed to turn over the rights of the Panama Canal to local control by 1999. The CIA also cultivated albeit questionable intelligence assets in Panama such as Colonel Manuel Noriega. Noriega was also a staunch supporter of the Torrijos regime and became its G-2 (intelligence) head. In reality, Noriega played both sides in the Cold War and seemed to have leaned towards Havana and Managua by the mid-1980s. The CIA's cultivation of security risks as foreign informants lent at least some credence to the concerns that the Agency was penetrated by questionable sources. Noriega's relationship with the American intelligence community would only serve to highlight such concerns.

International communist influence in Panama exploded after the Torrijos coup in 1968. Havana gained a foothold in Central America. Cuban agents served in the Agrarian Communes, the Tomas Herrera Military Institute of the *Guardia Nacional*, and sugar mills. The Panamanian sugar mill managers were assisted by Cuban technicians, while the Tomas Herrera Military Institute was controlled by an officer of the Cuban Territorial Troop Militia. The state-owned Radio Libertad was advised by that hotbed of Cuban intelligence officers known as *Prensa Latina*. Between 1971 and 1975, the *Prensa Latina* office in Panama was also used to funnel PDP cadres to Cuba for training.²

Former Soviet documents confirmed Torrijos' intense anti-Americanism. These documents also detailed the deception campaign undertaken by Torrijos to dupe Washington with professions of friendship. Torrijos informed Nikolai Leonov (KGB First Chief Directorate) of his intention to take over the Panama Canal Zone and eliminate all American influence. Torrijos then concluded to Leonov: "*This is the religion of my life.*" American diplomat Jack Vaughn noted that Torrijos sought to win over visiting and sympathetic leftwing US Senators through "*A very carefully orchestrated devastatingly effective show...The effect on a gringo politician was 'This guy has real power, he can make things happen.' He really did a job on the*

¹ McDonald, Larry Congressman. "US Canal Zone: Communism in Panama" Congressional Record January 12, 1977 pages 1051-1052.

² Ibid.

Senate.” In talks with Leonov in 1978, Torrijos noted that “*I hate the United States but my position forces me to tolerate a great deal. How I envy Fidel Castro!*” In other words, Torrijos needed the trade, aid, and revenue from the United States and the Panama Canal to keep his socialist despotism afloat. In addition, Torrijos did not want to overly antagonize Washington, which could then unleash its forces in the Canal Zone to attack the weaker *Guardia Nacional* forces. Torrijos referred to anti-communist US Senators as “*crude,*” “*arrogant,*” and as “*cavemen*” whose thinking belonged to “*the previous century.*” Torrijos also informed Leonov that by 2000, Latin America would have “*adopted socialism in one form or another.*”³ Other sources confirmed Panamanian intentions to occupy the American-held Canal Zone. Alexis Watson-Castillo, Chief of the Human Resources Department, Budget Accountant and G-2 agent, defected and revealed that *Guardia Nacional* officers already divided up the houses in the Canal Zone for confiscation upon a complete takeover of the Panama Canal. He also noted that once the United States withdrew from the Canal Zone, Soviet technicians would then take over the operation of the canal.⁴

Torrijos died in a plane crash in 1981 and Noriega gradually gained more power in Panama. He became the chief of the Panama Defense Forces (PDF) in 1983 and aggregated increased, *de facto* power by the mid-1980s. Noriega ruled Panama through puppet Presidents and secured many loyalists amongst the activist based of the PRD. By 1986, the PRD and Noriega turned markedly leftward. Noriega’s leftward turn endeared him to elements of the laboring classes in Panama. The PDP also successfully recruited an increased number of members in 1986 and 1987. Such recruitment efforts increased PDP membership to 13,089. The PDP and the PRD retained their militant anti-Americanism. The PDP condemned America’s “*aggressive, militaristic policy.*” They urged a withdrawal of PDF cooperation with American forces. The PDP were also staunch supporters of Noriega’s rule in Panama. The PDP called Noriega “*a main target of US criticism*” and praised the thuggish dictator as a “*fighter for the nation’s sovereignty.*” At its 1986 Congress, the PDP also called for the creation of a “*broad anti-imperialist democratic front*” populated by PDF officers, the PRD, the PDP, and allied leftist parties. A PDP statement condemned the United States for “*actions designed to topple the government and to throw out the Torrijists from the Defense Forces, primarily by ousting General M.A. Noriega.*” A World Marxist Review article authored by PDP general secretary Ruben Dario Sousa noted that “*General Noriega has come from the midst of patriotic officers as the man prepared to carry on the Torrijos...The General is being personally vilified in an effort to deprive the democratic and anti-imperialist movement of its leader.*”⁵

By 1989, the PDP maintained at least 500 to 1,000 hard-core militants. It operated through a variety of fronts, such as the Panama Peace Committee, Committee for the Defense of Sovereignty and Peace, and National Center of Workers of Panama. Leftist elements within the PRD, such as Orville Goodman, entered the Noriega government. Such ultra-leftist PRD members moved the Noriega regime to an almost Marxist position. During the 1989 elections, the PRD painted the democratic and liberal opposition as puppets of the United States. One such

³ Mitrokhin, Vassili and Andrew, Christopher. The World Was Going Our Way (Basic Books 2006) pages 108-113.

⁴ McDonald, Larry P. “Panama Defector Denounces Canal Treaties” Congressional Record April 3, 1978 page 8507.

⁵ Yearbook of International Communist Affairs 1989 (Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University., 1989) pages 105-109.

slogan read: “*COLINA Si, Colonia, No!*” During this time period, Panama’s increased links to the communist world were handled through officials of the Noriega regime, the PRD, and its left-wing, which was known as the Tendencia.⁶ The Noriega regime also denied the existence of the communist threat within Panama and redirected popular opprobrium to American interventions. In December 1987, Noriega noted that “*the communists are not the ones seeking economic benefits. The self-seeking capitalists are the ones seeking economic advantage when it is convenient for them.*”⁷

Noriega and the G-2 collaborated closely with the Cuban intelligence and Americas Department (DA) officials such as Manuel Pineiro during the 1970s. The Americas Department was the premier agency used by Cuba to subvert Latin America. Since 1970, G-2 officers traveled to Cuba for training in “*Political Security.*” They were transported aboard Panamanian *Guardia Nacional* planes. The DGI-controlled *Prensa Latina* and G-2 monitored the entry of foreign guests.⁸ Cuban DA chief Manuel Pineiro maintained long-established ties with Noriega. In November 1975, Pineiro led a Cuban delegation which visited Panama. The Cubans met with Noriega and other high-level Panamanian government officials. In 1975, Pineiro provided advice to Torrijos during the negotiations with the United States regarding the Panama Canal Treaty.⁹

In 1983, the Cuban DA station in Panama was staffed by 6 agents.¹⁰ The Cuban DA used Panama to support leftist rebels and parties in Central America.¹¹ In 1978 and 1979, Panama was used by the Cuban DA to ferry weapons to the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. Luis Hernandez Ojeda, a Cuban DA operations chief, supervised these operations from Panama.¹² Cuba maintained a large embassy in Panama City, which served to assist Central American communist terrorists. DGI defector Major Florentino Aspillaga reported that the Cuban Minister of the Interior (MININT) Jose Abrahantes Fernandez maintained close ties to Noriega. Noriega supplied weapons to Honduras and Colombian leftists and the Salvadoran FMLN through Minister Abrahantes.¹³ In 1986, the United States Department of Commerce reported that 20 of the 60 Cuban front companies which operated in Panama provided weapons to Latin American leftists.¹⁴

The Reagan Administration and much of Congress grew weary of Noriega’s corruption, human rights abuses, and cooperation with Cuba. Noriega used increasing American hostility towards Panama as an excuse to solidify the already close ties to Havana and Managua. While Noriega was not an ideological communist, he was always an anti-American extreme nationalist and Torrijos loyalist. At the end of the day, Noriega used the CIA for his own purposes, not necessarily out of loyalty or love of the United States or the cause of anti-communism. By early 1988, Noriega increased his reliance on Cuba to help preserve his power against increasing

⁶ Yearbook of International Communist Affairs (Hoover Institution Press, 1990) pages 125-128.

⁷ “Noriega Comments” Panama City Domestic Service December 16, 1987

⁸ McDonald, Larry Congressman. “US Canal Zone: Communism in Panama” Congressional Record January 12, 1977 pages 1051-1052.

⁹ Hudson, Rex A. Castro’s America Department: Coordinating Cuba’s Support for Marxist-Leninist Violence in the Americas (The Cuban American National Foundation 1988) Accessed From: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/rex-hudson.htm>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

American antagonism. High-level Cuban DGI agents advised Noriega on quelling opposition within Panama.¹⁵ According to defecting Major Augusto Villalaz, Noriega and the Cubans established an airlift of weapons and personnel to assist the PDF. The Cubans shipped arms such as 100,000 AK-47 assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, hand-grenades, and ammunition to Noriega's forces. Eduardo Arango, the Panamanian Consul General in London, charged that Cuban weapons shipments were unloaded by Panamanian political cadres and technicians who had been trained "*by the hundreds*" in Cuba and the Soviet Union. By mid-April 1988, the Sandinistas and Cubans dispatched over 1,800 cadres and agents to Panama. The Cuban DA also set up an advisory team for Noriega. Top members of this team consisted of Luis Arbesu (DA vice chief José Antonio Arbesu Fraga); DA vice chief Fernando Ravelo; Ramiro Abreu Quintana, the DA Central American Section chief; and Jose Luis Ojalvo; and DA official Luis Hernandez Ojeda. According to Rex Hudson, Arbesu was "*reputed to be an expert in manipulating the U.S. political system and media, presumably was advising the less astute Panamanian dictator on ways of countering the U.S. pressure campaign against him.*"¹⁶ As we will see, the Noriega regime would attempt to create solidarity committees to neutralize and discredit the international opposition led by the United States. The Noriega dictatorship forged ties with ideological sympathizers, such as the Lyndon LaRouche movement and various communist parties in the United States. It was possible that Arbesu had a hand in these operations. The pro-Noriega government newspaper *Critica* disseminated disinformation against the United States and the opposition. The Panamanian government often used articles from American publications to support Noriega's point of view.¹⁷ This was a tactic that was used by communist countries, including Cuba. This could have been one of the tactics suggested by Arbesu to the propagandists of the Noriega regime.

At least one Nicaraguan and Cuban-style "*solidarity conference*" was held to drum up support for Noriega and to recommend various propaganda measures to neutralize American intervention in Panama. In March 1988, the anti-US "*Solidarity Rally*" in Panama City hosted delegations of leftist and communist parties from Antigua, Barbados, Belize, Curacao, Dominica, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, St Kitts, St Vincent, Venezuela, Tobago, St Lucia, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Cuba, Argentina, Colombia, Trinidad and Tobago. Noriega noted at this Rally that "*...we are waging the last battle against colonialism...Here in Panama we are waging a hand-to-hand combat of Latin American dignity. This is the last bastion of Latin American dignity, so do not let it fall; do not let Panama lose this battle...Panama has been subjected to a brutal aggression never before recorded in the history of aggressions.*"¹⁸

In March 1988, the Panamanian puppet President Manuel Solis Palma spoke before the Solidarity with Panama conference, where he demanded that Panama "*stop the long and aggressive hand of the United States.*" Over sixty delegates from 27 Caribbean, Central, and South American countries participated in the conference. Solis noted that his government fought "*against the aggression*" of the US. Furthermore, President Solis requested from the 60 foreign

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Branigin, William. "Psychological Warfare in Panama; Noriega, Ex-Intelligence Officer, Is Said to Be Master of Craft" *Washington Post* May 3, 1988 page A24.

¹⁸ "Panama: Noriega Addresses Anti-US 'Solidarity' Rally" *Panama City home service* March 31, 1988

delegates to “*take actions to halt the aggression.*” Solis also requested that the domestic and foreign delegates to the conference depart from Panama with a clear idea what is “*really going on*” in respect to the Noriega regime “*so (the) truth (can) be told and U.S. disinformation can be confronted.*” Solis also requested that these delegates develop in their home countries “*solidarity with Panama committees.*”¹⁹

In March 1988, the declaration of the Solidarity Conference in Panama urged its foreign and domestic delegates “*To support the decision of the Panamanian people and government to fight US imperialism’s political, economic and military aggression and to support their willingness to expand economic, political and diplomatic relations with all countries, especially with Third World countries...To create national solidarity committees with the Panamanian people and government comprised of the largest political, social and labour sectors in each of the participating countries...To carry out, through these committees, specific actions of solidarity in each of the participating countries such as demonstrations, meetings, marches and acts of protest in front of US embassies and diplomatic representations, as well as actions of solidarity with the Panamanian people’s and government’s struggle...The first Central American and Caribbean meeting of solidarity with Panama urges its participants to organise a worldwide solidarity meeting in support of the Panamanian people and government as soon as possible to consolidate the support of all democratic, progressive, nationalist and revolutionary sectors and to grant Panamanians the continuity of the decolonisation process started by General Omar Torrijos Herrera.*”²⁰

A leading member of the anti-Noriega Civic Crusade Roberto Brenes reported that “*The Cubans are particularly involved in the economic decisions, in planning for the possible issuing of Panamanian currency and in other aspects of the government, including policy and relations with the U.S. The Nicaraguans are said to be involved in security and intelligence and serve as a liaison with the Sandinista army.*”²¹

The Dignity Battalions were formed and modeled on the Cuban Territorial Troop Militia (MTT). In reality, the Dignity Battalions was a paramilitary gang which consisted of urban toughs and ideological leftist-nationalists. The Dignity Battalions were tasked by the government to physically assault anti-Noriega oppositionists and combat a potential invasion by American troops. In 1988 and 1989, the Cubans assisted and trained the Dignity Battalions.²² In fact, by May 1988, a 15 man Cuban “*crisis group*” advised Noriega to inaugurate the Dignity Battalions.²³

One PDF officer noted to American interrogators that “*Havana gave Noriega massive quantities of weapons*” to the Dignity Battalions. PDF officers also recalled that Cuba trained a number of their colleagues in sabotage, intelligence gathering, and guerrilla warfare. Castro

¹⁹ “Panama: President Demands Regional Solidarity” IPS-Inter Press Service March 28, 1988

²⁰ “Panama: Declaration Issued at End of ‘Solidarity’ Meeting” Panama City home service March 31, 1988

²¹ Fabricio, Roberto. “Cubans, Nicaraguans Reportedly Aiding Noriega” Times Union, The (Albany, NY) April 15, 1988

²² Yearbook of International Communist Affairs (Hoover Institution Press, 1990) pages 125-128.

²³ Branigin, William. “Psychological Warfare in Panama; Noriega, Ex-Intelligence Officer, Is Said to Be Master of Craft” Washington Post May 3, 1988 page A24.

informed Noriega that the formation of the Dignity Battalions were “*an extremely good idea.*”²⁴ Former pro-Noriega President Eric Delvalle reported that hundreds of Cuban troops were based in camps located in the Province of Chiriqui. He noted that “*In some parts of Chiriqui, the Cubans are descending from the mountains in search of food...People have seen them grabbing cows and other animals.*”²⁵ A defecting PDF officer named Commander Romano reported that groups of a dozen Panamanian soldiers were dispatched to Cuba and Libya for 2 to 6 month training courses in the use of Soviet-bloc weapons.²⁶ Noriega allowed the Cubans to establish a secret transmitting station in the Panamanian jungles which was manned by the DGI. In April 1989, fifty Cuban Special Troops (*Tropas Especiales*) commandoes attacked American Marines who guarded a tank farm near Howard Air Force base in Panama.²⁷

Between October 1988 and January 1989, 28 PDF officers were trained in sabotage, explosives, camouflage, and concealment methods and tactics in Cuba and Nicaragua. In early 1989, another 29 PDF officers received counter-intelligence training in Sandinista Nicaragua. Former Panamanian intelligence officer Felipe Camargo observed that “*Although Castro said the Cuban aid would be limited to war materials since it could not afford to involve Cuban troops, Castro thought it important that Panama had large quantities of arms. He felt it would dissuade the U.S. from military attack because of the potential loss of American lives...According to Camargo, Castro also felt that Panama could effectively resist an invasion long enough to permit the United Nations to bring about a cease-fire.*”²⁸

Cuba also maintained a base of operations at their Embassy in the capital city of Panama. The Cuban Embassy in Panama City was used to purchase American-made goods in order to circumvent the already porous embargo. The Cuban Embassy in Panama City advised Torrijos. By 1977, the Cuban Embassy in Panama City was staffed with 225 employees. A Cuban front company called Transit S.A. was owned Rodrigo Gonzales, who was a loyal ally of Torrijos. This company bought US-made goods for Cuban consumption.²⁹ Cuban imports from Panama’s Colon Free Zone rose from \$15.3 million in 1982 to \$48.5 million in 1986.³⁰ The Cuban Embassy in Panama City was also used for espionage purposes against American targets. In 1985, the Cuban Embassy in Panama and the PDF established a communications center in Panama called Manguito in the Cangrejo sector of Panama City. It was used to monitor

²⁴ Hedges, Stephen J. “Noriega, Inc./Investigators uncovering how CEO looted Panama” The San Francisco Chronicle January 2, 1991

²⁵ Oppenheimer, Andres. “Cuba’s Role in Panama Sparks Contradictory Reports” Miami Herald April 30, 1988

²⁶ Oppenheimer, Andres. “Panama Officers Were Trained in Cuba and Libya, Exile Says” Miami Herald October 13, 1989

²⁷ Evans, Rowland and Novak, Robert. “Cuban Fingerprints in Panama” Washington Post June 17, 1988

²⁸ “Panama Documents Say Noriega Helped Israel-Cuba Contact” Miami Herald July 29, 1990

²⁹ McDonald, Larry Congressman. “US Canal Zone: Communism in Panama” Congressional Record January 12, 1977 pages 1051-1052.

³⁰ Oppenheimer, Andres. “Cuba’s Role in Panama Sparks Contradictory Reports” Miami Herald April 30, 1988

SOUTHCORP.³¹ In 1985, Noriega repatriated a diplomat who attempted to defect to the Cuban Embassy.³²

Thousands of Panamanian students were also dispatched to the USSR and Cuba for training. Between 1972 and 1981, some 8,000 Panamanians attended Patrice Lumumba University. Since 1981, Cuba hosted 2,500 students from Panama at the University of Havana and the Technical University in Cuba. These students became professors at the national university in Panama City.³³

After February 1988, Libya's Qaddafi provided a \$20 million loan to Noriega. Throughout 1988, PDF officers also attempted to acquire rifles, artillery, fabric for 100,000 uniforms, and \$50 million from Libya.³⁴

The Soviets also became more involved in Panama in the later years of Noriega's rule. Sensing that they could gain another outpost in Central America, Moscow sought to provide economic, political, and financial support to Panama. In order to bust American sanctions, the Soviet state airline Aeroflot flew in desperately needed US dollars from Havana into Panama City.³⁵ Aeroflot also started regular flights to Panama, while the USSR offered to pay for all of the Panamanian sugar covered under US quota agreements.³⁶ Former Panamanian diplomat Jose Bandon charged that Noriega held a secret 15% interest in the Panamanian company that served as the agent for Aeroflot of the Soviet Union.³⁷ In September 1989, Mateo Castillero, the director-general of La Victoria Sugar Mill Corporation noted that in the wake of the removal of the US sugar quota, Panama shipped sugar to France, other European countries, and the Soviet Union.³⁸ In late November 1989, a Panamanian government delegation led by Gustavo Gonzalez, Minister of Planning and Economic Policy and Elmo Martinez Blanco, Minister of Commerce and Industries, visited the USSR. The Panamanians noted that "*the purpose of their visit was to look for new international markets for the country in order to cope with the US government's economic aggression.*" The Soviet Foreign Trade Bank agreed to dispatch legal and technical representatives to link Panama's banks with the USSR. Talks were also held

³¹ Russo, Daniel L. The Cuba-Panama Connection (Institute of Interamerican Studies Graduate School of International Studies University of Miami 1990) pages 7-12.

³² Hedges, Stephen J. "Noriega, Inc./Investigators uncovering how CEO looted Panama" The San Francisco Chronicle January 2, 1991

³³ Russo, Daniel L. The Cuba-Panama Connection (Institute of Interamerican Studies Graduate School of International Studies University of Miami 1990) pages 7-12.

³⁴ Hedges, Stephen J. "Noriega, Inc./Investigators uncovering how CEO looted Panama" The San Francisco Chronicle January 2, 1991

³⁵ Brock, David. "Book Review: Our Man in Panama, by John Dinges; Divorcing the Dictator, by Frederick Kempe" Commentary Magazine June 1, 1990 Accessed From: <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/our-man-in-panama-by-john-dinges-divorcing-the-dictator-by-frederick-kempe/>

³⁶ Yearbook of International Communist Affairs 1989 (Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University., 1989) pages 105-109.

³⁷ "Bandon Says Noriega Built Up Fortune, Had Numerous Ties" The Associated Press February 2, 1988

³⁸ "Reorganisation of sugar industry after USA ends quota" Radio Nacional September 26, 1989

regarding trade in foodstuffs and usage of Panamanian shipyards for Soviet vessels.³⁹ East Germany and Cuba assisted the Noriega regime with the suppression of opposition and American radio and television broadcasts.⁴⁰

The Sandinistas also forged close ties with Noriega's Panama on the account of their mutual anti-Americanism. While on a visit to Panama, Daniel Ortega remarked that: "*The Panamanian Defense Forces are defending the sovereignty of the Panamanian people...There is a full scale conspiracy to crush them and throw out the Carter-Torrijos treaties at the same time.*" Captain Ricardo Wheelock of Sandinista military intelligence attended a Panamanian national intelligence seminar hosted by Noriega. Noriega also met with Salvadoran communist FMLN leaders in Panama and offered to provide weapons to them.⁴¹ In late December 1989, American troops captured Uzi submachine guns, AK-47 semiautomatic rifles, RPGs, and ammunition while they searched the residence of Nicaraguan Ambassador Antenor Ferrey in Panama. The State Department commented that the arms cache in the Nicaraguan Embassy was "*in excess of normal requirements for defending the residence.*"⁴²

As of June 1988, opposition elements within the Panamanian Embassy reported that delegations from the ruling Cuban Communist Party, the Salvadoran FMLN, the Guatemalan URNG, the Sandinista dictatorship in Nicaragua, the Progressive People's Party of Guyana, the Working People's Alliance of Guyana, a gaggle of leftists from the Caribbean, the Cuban DGI-controlled Puerto Rican Socialist Party, the Workers' Party of Jamaica, the Unified Party of Haitian Communists, the Communist Party of Honduras, the Cuban and Libyan-supported Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement of Grenada, and the pro-Cuban Socialist Workers Party of the United States all visited and conferred solidarity upon the Noriega regime.⁴³ In November 1989, the Panamanian Committee for Solidarity with the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) launched a drive to send the Salvadoran Communists medicines, money, and clothing. Several Panamanian workers' organizations demonstrated against the Salvadoran Embassy in Panama City.⁴⁴

Noriega, his government officials, and staunch supporters within the PRD all spewed pseudo-leftist, extreme nationalist, and anti-American rhetoric during the period from 1987 to 1989. The United States, the opposition, and the so-called oligarchy were all denounced during this timeframe. In keeping with the traditions of Torrijos, Noriega and the PRD represented their government as allies of the workers and peasants in Panama. The ideology of the Dignity Battalions exhibited a Marxist tinge, no doubt the result of Cuban military training and the influx of leftists into its ranks. In July 1987, Noriega observed that the PDF was "*an obstacle to the old*

³⁹ "Panama government delegation's visit" BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 1, 1989

⁴⁰ Hunter, Thomas. "Operation Acid Gambit The Rescue of Kurt Muse" SpecialOperations.com Accessed From:

http://www.specialoperations.com/Operations/Just_Cause/Acid_Gambit/default2.html

⁴¹ Yearbook of International Communist Affairs 1989 (Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University., 1989) pages 105-109.

⁴² Price, Debbie M. and Lippman, Thomas W. "Residence search was 'screw-up,' Bush says" St. Petersburg Times December 31, 1989

⁴³ "Embassy of Panama Releases List of Noriega Supporters" PR Newswire June 30, 1988,

⁴⁴ "Panama's Pro-FMLN Group Collects Medicines, Clothing, Money" Xinhua General News Service November 18, 1989

Panamanian oligarchy. It is an obstacle to the old agents of the old colonialism who have been servants of foreign powers since 1904."⁴⁵

In April 1988, Noriega noted to Cuban journalists from Tele-Rebelde that *"Here in Panama we are fighting the last battle against colonialism and neo-colonialism and against the dependence and submissiveness of the weak peoples who are subjected to a scandalous debt and to threats of force and coercion. We have the essential elements that the United States needs to punish Latin American leaders, peoples, and governments that are not docile to US mandates."*⁴⁶

Noriega noted in March 1988 that *"The opposition movement here is to use a classic, rather than an ideological, term the traditional Panamanian oligarchy that dominated this country from 1903 until 1968, when Torrijos ousted it from power. From 1968 to 1969, there was a social change in this country. The children of lottery ticket sellers, the children of cooks, the children of teachers and the children of peasants received the ability and opportunity to join the government. That change took place in the era of revolutionary processes, when Velasco Alvarado in Peru was also making similar changes. It was the period of social change. Torrijos was also carrying out changes here in Panama. Then, those who were ousted from power, those of that minority class called the white asses (rabiblanco) ... Most of the people here are not white they are black or Indian. In the past few days it could be seen that the opposition is concentrated in a single street, just as they comprise a single group, the Panamanian oligarchy. The popular masses do not accept that concept, however. Why? Because the popular masses already know what it was like to be governed by that oligarchy. The phenomenon is not as it is presented in international news reports, which say the majority of the people are against the government. No. It is the majority of the Panamanian oligarchy that is against a popular government like this one."*⁴⁷

In June 1988, Noriega noted at an "anti-imperialist meeting" that *"The history of Latin American nations has been marked by the imperialist pendulum that functions on the basis of aggression and fears. I say aggression because we know of past marine landings in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, the aggressions against Mexico and the brutal expansion through Central America in an attempt to conquer it through the big-stick policy. The aggression is no different now. Now, there is psychological aggression and brutal economic aggression. Only the methods, the system, have changed. But the imperialist doctrine of aggression persists, and it has now become more sophisticated because it is aimed at the hunger of the Latin American peoples and the hunger of the Panamanian people ... We support democracy. We support a participatory, independent, people's democracy. We do not support a democracy that has elections and lets the people die of hunger. That is the kind of democracy (the USA) wanted to impose on us at the last talks ... Our democracy must work in terms of this people's and this country's needs. It must work in terms of this country's destiny. We must not and cannot accept democracies that have foreign tutors and porters. We do not want or accept democracies*

⁴⁵ "Panama: Noriega Interviewed on Democracy and Role of Military" El Dia July 31, 1987

⁴⁶ "Panama: Noriega on 'Dignity Battalions,' Coup Rumours" Cubavision television April 26, 1988

⁴⁷ "Panama: Noriega on Internal Opposition, US Southern Command" Peruana television March 12, 1988

discussed and drafted at the US embassy... We do not want democracies that maintain the status quo of the current arrogant and defiant colonialism."⁴⁸

In March 1988, the Noriega loyalist and PRD official Luis Gaspar Suarez noted that *"Now all the economic might of the largest capitalist power in the world is trying to destroy our people who are struggling to maintain their independence and sovereignty."* He noted that *"In Panama today, the politicians of the pro-imperialist oligarchic parties have failed in their attempt to control the popular masses."*⁴⁹

In December 1988, Noriega's puppet President Solis condemned *"imperialism's attacks"* and remarked that *"...we are going to place the defence of the homeland above all interests. The government has to take some measures. But when the government is cornered by that oligarchy which you criticise and which you justifiably say is our common enemy when that oligarchy, which is the direct arm of the North Americans in Panama and which throughout the years and through historic circumstances which must also be considered has placed us in very difficult situations, the problems cannot be resolved overnight... What is at stake is Torrijism, its significance and its achievements. What is at stake is the participation of the popular sectors. What is at stake is the workers' achievements. What is at stake is the future of the Panamanian homeland, and when that is at stake, there cannot be a single sector in the country that identifies with the struggle that will not jump into the arena to kill the bull, which is the Panamanian oligarchy. We cannot give the oligarchy the opportunity to seize power because if we did so, we would not only be assholes (Spanish pendejos) but traitors."*⁵⁰

In July 1989, the Manifiesto of the Dignity Battalions noted that *"It was not until the emergence of capitalism as a system of exploitation that the United States was able to consolidate its imperialist strategies and to control through the Latin American wealthy class the people who in the past had carried out just struggles to liberate themselves from the Spanish empire. In other words the desire to accumulate capital brought together class interest and a nation's natural inclination to control others consolidating the empire through economic commitments and cultural assimilation."* The Manifiesto also noted that *"In alliance with Panama's elite and wealthy classes the United States has tried to gain strength by implementing US-style democracy."*⁵¹

Despite the American economic sanctions against Noriega, trade relations with the United States were not completely severed. Despite the hostile rhetoric directed at the oligarchy and the closer ties with the anti-US axis, American multinationals continued to trade with the Noriega dictatorship. Noriega and the PRD sought to maintain Western and American investment and trade. They also sought to downplay the leftist rhetoric and anti-imperialism before audiences of foreign businessmen. In April 1988, President Solis noted that *"There will be no intervention in private enterprise. The country will not be declared a socialist state, because we are a capitalist group that has been attacked by another capitalist country."*⁵² As of May 1989, American multinationals and projects contributed about \$500 million a year to Noriega's

⁴⁸ "Noriega Addresses Anti-Imperialist Meeting on US 'Experiment' in Panama" Panama City home service June 24, 1988

⁴⁹ "Luis Gaspar Suarez Address" Panama City Domestic Service March 28, 1988

⁵⁰ "Panama Solis Palma Responds to Trade Union Criticism of Inequality and Corruption" Panama City home service December 13, 1988

⁵¹ "Paper on Manifiesto of Dignity Brigade" Panama City La Republica Dominicana July 9, 1989

⁵² "Solis, Ministers Comment" Panama City Domestic Service April 25, 1988

economy. American multinationals engaged in trading with Panama included Texaco and the banana-growing Cherokee Land Company.⁵³ As of early December 1989, Texaco supplied refined oil to the PDF's trucks and other vehicles.⁵⁴

Noriega maintained close ties with Japan. A Panama City newspaper headline crowed "*Japan officially recognizes the government.*"⁵⁵ In March 1988, Japan agreed that it would recognize the Noriega regime. Tokyo maintained financial interests in Panama. Since 1985, Noriega made several trips to Japan. In 1987, Japan exported \$2.41 billion worth of goods to Panama and imported \$48 million worth of goods from Panama. Since 1982, Japanese investment in Panama increased to \$8.8 billion.⁵⁶ As of 1988, Mexico reportedly supplied Panama with 12,000 barrels of oil per day. In 1986, Mexico exported \$103 million worth of goods to Panama. Panama shipped only \$15 million worth of goods to Mexico.⁵⁷

Various neo-fascist and communist groups in the United States supported the Noriega regime or opposed American efforts to dislodge it from power. In February 1988, American neo-fascist Lyndon LaRouche noted in a message to Noriega: "*I extend to you my apologies for what the government of the United States is doing to the Republic of Panama...I reiterate to you what I have stated publicly. That the Reagan administration current policies towards Panama are absolutely an offense to your nation and all of Latin America.*"⁵⁸ Defecting Panamanian diplomat Jose Bandon noted that Noriega funded the LaRouche movement in the US. LaRouche described Noriega as a "*brilliant man*" and "*one of the best anti-drug fighters on the continent*" in 1987.⁵⁹ Panamanian government newspapers quoted the LaRouchian publication Executive Intelligence Review (EIR).⁶⁰ In May 1989, 30 LaRouchians protested against American intervention in Panama. They carried signs that stated "*U.S. hands off Panama.*"⁶¹

Most significant was the communist connection in the LaRouche-Noriega relationship. According to the defecting Panamanian diplomat Jose Bandon, LaRouche maintained ties to the Noriega dictatorship through a communist member of the Panamanian government named Mario Parnter. Parnter appeared as a "*witness*" before the LaRouche front conference Commission to

⁵³ Frazier, Joseph B. "Economy Holding Together Despite Damage From U.S. Sanctions" The Associated Press May 4, 1989

⁵⁴ Maggs, John. "Texaco Faces Paradox With Panama Refinery" Journal of Commerce December 4, 1989 page 7B.

⁵⁵ Butts, David. "Japan guided by economics in Panama crisis" United Press International March 19, 1988

⁵⁶ "Japan prepares to back Noriega government" United Press International March 4, 1988

⁵⁷ Golden, Arthur. "Mexico takes Panama's side against U.S." The San Diego Union-Tribune May 8, 1988 page A22.

⁵⁸ "Noriega Received Support" Sun-Sentinel January 11, 1990

⁵⁹ Woodward, Bob and Pichirallo, Joe. "Wide Panamanian Corruption Alleged by Former Consul-Noriega Aide Calls Charges 'Ridiculous'" Washington Post February 2, 1988

⁶⁰ Greve, Frank. "Dirt on Noriega Foes is Tied to LaRouche" Miami Herald March 21, 1988

⁶¹ Anderson, Jim. "OAS resolution pins blame on Noriega for crisis in Panama" United Press International May 18, 1989

Investigate Human Rights Violations in the United States. He also delivered cash to the LaRouche movement on behalf of the Panamanian government.⁶²

The entire domestic Left and communist apparatus heartily opposed the American intervention in Panama in late December 1989. In late December 1989, the Communist Party USA noted that *“Following on the heels of military intervention in the Philippines and the previous Reagan-Bush invasion of Grenada, the military aggression against Panama is nothing less than arrogant, chauvinistic raw imperialist power against a country considered to be a fly in the ointment of U.S. corporate-military plans for Panama. As in the past, the U.S. Congress was not notified or consulted. It was an illegal declaration of war. It is part of a pattern of U.S. imperialist aggression. For two years the U.S. has been scheming and maneuvering for an excuse to reestablish direct control over the Panama Canal and make Panama safe for U.S. corporate profits -- not democracy. In essence, this Bush policy of aggression is no different than was the policy of Hitler fascism. The Nazis used the same arguments to justify their invasions and attempt to dominate the world...The military invasion of Panama was a despicable, brutal act of naked terrorism against a sovereign nation and people.”*⁶³

One tangible legacy of multiple superpower involvement in Panama under Torrijos and Noriega were the stockpiles of weapons provided to the *Guardia Nacional* and later the PDF. Under Noriega, the PDF acquired Cadillac Gage Commando armored vehicles in 1983 and 1984. It also had V-300 and V-150 APCs and command vehicles. The PDF possessed American, Israeli, Soviet, Warsaw Pact, and Western European-made small arms; the Soviet and Warsaw Pact weapons were shipped via Cuba and Nicaragua. American-made M-16A1 and Taiwanese T-65 rifles in the PDF inventory were gradually replaced by the AK-47 and AKM rifles. The AKs, T-65s, and M-16s were then supplied to the Dignity Battalions. Twenty Soviet-made ZPU anti-aircraft guns were also provided to the PDF. Soviet made RPG-2, RPG-7, and RPG-18 antitank missiles were provided, along with US, Israeli, and French-made mortars. Over 76,500 weapons were captured, more than what was required by the PDF. One author noted that *“Noriega’s future plans can only be guessed at.”*⁶⁴ Perhaps Noriega’s future plans were to become a military ally of Cuba and Nicaragua in an effort to create what the Heritage Foundation referred to as a *“Warsaw Pact of the West.”*⁶⁵

Despite the appeals to foreign investors, the PRD and Noriega clearly moved Panama to the Left in domestic policy. This was the result of the ideological roots of the PRD itself, avarice on the part of Noriega, and the presence of Cuban political advisers in the Panamanian government. Increased government control of the economy, more political authoritarianism, slave labor camps, and use of thugs were factors which characterized the brutality of the Noriega/PRD dictatorship. By 1988, a concerned Panamanian businessman noted that *“Noriega is rallying the left...He’s as red as they come you know.”* Anti-Noriega opponents chanted during demonstrations *“No to Noriega, No to Communism.”* The shift to the Left by the government

⁶² Chitwood, Bryan R. “Ex-Panamanian official links LaRouche to Noriega” *Loudoun Times-Mirror* February 4, 1988 Accessed From: <http://lyndonlarouche.org/larouche-noriega-chitwood.htm>

⁶³ “Communist Party USA Issues Statement on Panama” *PR Newswire* December 20, 1989,

⁶⁴ Rottman, Gordon. *Panama 1989-1990* (Osprey Publishing, 1991) pages 14-15.

⁶⁵ Kim R. “What Is At Risk in El Salvador” Heritage Foundation December 5, 1989 Accessed From: <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/1989/12/what-is-at-risk-in-el-salvador>

was masterminded by a faction of the PRD called The Tendency, which met on a regular basis in the Bank of Boston building in Panama City.⁶⁶

Others pointed to the fact that Noriega moved to the Left as a result of opportunism and the prospects of financial gain. DGI Major Florentino Aspillaga Lombard noted that *"Noriega isn't a communist. He doesn't share Fidel's ideas...But Noriega likes dollars. Cuba needed and the Soviet Union needed many products that we could not get otherwise. Noriega has many businesses of all kinds -- clean businesses and some that are not clean. Through the knowledge of intelligence agents we have in Panama, we saw we could use Noriega. So we used him."*⁶⁷

It was clear that the PRD and other Noriega loyalists were ideologically committed to a virtual communist remolding of Panamanian society. In October 1987, the National Executive Committee of the Democratic Revolutionary Party issued a statement to La Republica Dominicana that stated: *"The enemy has exalted and firmly established fascist methods which are a clear imitation of those used for many months against Salvador Allende's administration in Chile until a massacre ensued. Consequently, the situation demands 'major surgery' procedures...There is an alliance between the party, workers, intellectuals, progressive people, national businessmen, and the Panama Defence Forces. A deep change must be accompanied by a model of organisation and civil participation that outlines changes and responsibilities as the most visible part of the renewed liberation process."*⁶⁸

In August 1987, Noriega noted that *"...we repeat that a strong homeland and social justice requires the active participation under equal conditions of the popular movements of workers and peasants, who can define the second revolution of a new republic."*⁶⁹ In May 1988, Noriega noted that *"The FDP supports the perfecting and strengthening of democracy. However, what democracy means to Panama is not what democracy is for the United States. Democracy for the United States, as a Ku Klux Klan institution, would not work here, because there are many blacks here...That Ku Klux Klan-type of democracy is not for us, because we are all blacks here..."*⁷⁰

By late 1989, top leaders of the PRD unveiled a package of totalitarian laws under the program of the *"The New Republic."* A set of laws would be set up to punish *"activities against the republic's institutions"* by *"sectors who are at the service of foreign interests."* A new media control law would regulate the content of newspapers, radio stations, and TV stations. All reports which *"go against the government or the economy"* would be prohibited by the government. All state employees who did not support the Noriega regime would be fired. The director of the state-owned electric company and head of the Dignity Battalions Benjamin Colamarco remarked that *"I would say that 60 percent of the physicians and 50 percent of the teachers are working*

⁶⁶ Walsh, Maurice. "Panamanian bankers upset by 'shift to the left' which could supplant the US dollar" The Guardian (London) April 25, 1988

⁶⁷ Pichirallo, Joe. "Cuba Used Noriega to Obtain High-Tech U.S. Goods, Defector Says" The Washington Post April 27, 1988 page A24.

⁶⁸ "Panama's PRD Urges 'Major Surgery,' Warns of 'Enemy's Fascist Methods'" Excerpts from 'document' by the National Executive Committee of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) October 13, 1987

⁶⁹ "Panama: Noriega Calls on President to Meet Needs of Popular Movements" Panama City home service August 14, 1987

⁷⁰ "Panama; Gen. Noriega Addresses Assembly on 'War' With USA: Talks With Reagan's Envoy 'Failed'" Panama City home service May 28, 1988

with the U.S. Embassy and the oligarchy... We will make room for many unemployed physicians and teachers who have a patriotic and nationalistic line.” The educational system was to be overhauled and impose mandatory “patriotic education” classes. New income tax laws would force the wealthy to pay more in taxes.⁷¹

A well-known banker and statesman Gilberto Arias recalled that “Everyone believed there was going to be a massacre on Dec. 24... We were waiting for it. He had studied Hitler and was fascinated with the Holocaust, and he was going to kill us all.” The head of the Public Employees’ Union William Sinclair noted that “There was strong intelligence there was going to be a massacre... Let me tell you, we were scared.” Mario Rognoni, the spokesman for Noriega, noted that the Dignity Battalions consisted of “the unemployed, workers from government agencies, and die-hard nationalists who were anti-American, some of whom had fought in Nicaragua, and all of a violent nature.”⁷²

These Battalions consisted initially of criminals and other civilian “volunteers” who were all under the auspices of the PDF. An employee of the state-owned telephone company noted that “This is like the start of a communist system... I didn’t educate my children to carry guns.” Dignity Battalions, PRD activists, and PDF forces sprayed slogans on the walls of buildings which stated “People’s sovereignty or total war” and “Against fascism, people’s terror.” Other slogans demanded the nationalization of the properties of the “oligarchy” and “Yankee imperialism.” Property was also destroyed by the thugs of the Dignity Battalions. The opposition-owned Machetazo department store was burned to the ground by a pro-Noriega mob.⁷³

It was reported by inmates and human rights group that Noriega’s opponents were imprisoned at a slave labor camp in Coiba. The inmates were beaten and tortured by the guards. Prisoners were forced to work 12 hour days growing crops which were sold to Noriega’s PDF cronies at a profit. Otilia Koster, head of the Center for the Investigation of Human Rights and Judicial Aid, reported that the Coiba slave labor camp served as “a money-laundering food-export business for the military.”⁷⁴

When American forces freed the Panamanian people from the tyranny of Noriega and his cronies, the entire stable of “reformist” and “hard-line” communist nations and their socialist and Islamist allies in the Third World joined forces to express their outrage at the United States and its “imperialism.” They proclaimed their solidarity with Noriega and the PRD. In late December 1989, the government-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation observed that the US invasion of Panama occurred “because President Gorbachev has abandoned the correct Leninist principle of proletarian internationalism.”⁷⁵ In late December 1989, Zimbabwean Foreign Minister Shamuyarira noted that the American invasion of Panama was in “utter disregard and contempt

⁷¹ Oppenheimer, Andres. “Noriega Readies Crackdown” Miami Herald October 8, 1989

⁷² Georgie Anne Geyer. Tulsa World February 7, 1990

⁷³ Branigin, William. “Psychological Warfare in Panama; Noriega, Ex-Intelligence Officer, Is Said to Be Master of Craft” Washington Post May 3, 1988 page A24.

⁷⁴ Pitt, David E. “The Noriega Case: Noriega’s Outcasts; For Panama’s Inmates, a Prison Like Devil’s Island” The New York Times January 7, 1990 page 19.

⁷⁵ “African reaction to US intervention in Panama” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 22, 1989

of international law” and a “serious violation of the fundamental principles of the UN Charter.” The Minister called upon the United States to halt its “unjustifiable aggression immediately.”⁷⁶

In late December 1989, Qaddafi expressed over Great SPLAJ Radio his “anger at the barbarity of the state terrorism.” Qaddafi noted to the Soviet Ambassador that Moscow needed “to assume its international obligations.” The Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran “condemned the American military invasion of Panama as...unjustifiable aggression” and “a most revealing example of state-sponsored terrorism.” The Syrian Arab Republic Radio reported that the “US invasion of Panama has been received with great international condemnation. The British Prime Minister was the sole supporter...”⁷⁷

In late December 1989, the Red Chinese Foreign Ministry noted that the American “military invasion” of Panama “violates the norms of international law and the aims and purposes of the UN Charter... We were shocked and condemn this act.”⁷⁸ The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry condemned the American invasion of Panama as a “serious violation” of the UN Charter.⁷⁹ The Vietnam Lawyers Association noted that the American invasion of Panama “grossly tramples upon Panama’s sovereignty.”⁸⁰ The North Korean Foreign Ministry denounced the American invasion of Panama as “an open act of aggression aimed at overthrowing a legitimate government of a sovereign state.”⁸¹ The North Koreans indicated that they would “spare no effort in giving all possible material and spiritual assistance to the Panamanian people.”⁸² Rangoon radio favorably reported Soviet criticism of the American invasion of Panama and stated that the overthrow of Noriega was a “violation of the UN Charter and the norms of international relations.”⁸³ The Burmese SLORC reported that “The use of military force by the USA in committing aggression against Panama in such a manner is regrettable because it is against these five principles and it violates the US Charter.”⁸⁴ The Laotian Foreign Ministry noted that the American invasion of Panama was an “overt violation of the UN Charter” and was an “open interference in the internal affairs of Panama.” The State of Cambodia Foreign Ministry expressed “concern over the situation in Panama as a result of the military intervention of US forces.” The Cambodians expressed the “people’s solidarity with the Panamanian people...” Jambyn Batmonh, the General Secretary of the Mongolian People’s

⁷⁶ “African reaction to US intervention in Panama” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 23, 1989

⁷⁷ “Middle East reaction to US intervention in Panama” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 22, 1989

⁷⁸ “Reaction to the US action in Panama” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 22, 1989

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ “Further Reaction to the US Invasion of Panama” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 28, 1989

⁸¹ “Reaction to the US action in Panama” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 22, 1989

⁸² “Further Reaction to the US Invasion of Panama” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 28, 1989

⁸³ “Reaction to the US action in Panama” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 22, 1989

⁸⁴ “Further Reaction to the US Invasion of Panama” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 28, 1989

Revolutionary Party (MPRP), condemned American “*interventionist actions that led to deaths of the innocent population.*” Ulan Bator radio reported that the Mongolian Peace Committee issued a statement which condemned the American invasion of Panama.⁸⁵

A commentator on Tirana radio in Albania noted that the American invasion of Panama was “*a criminal act*” and that the US action showed the “*aggressive nature of the policy that predominates in the White House.*” The Albanians noted that the United States was “*the biggest oppressor of democracy and of rights in the world.*” The Poles and Yugoslavs also issued statements that criticized the US invasion of Panama.⁸⁶ The Romanian Communist Party daily Scinteia dubbed the US invasion of Panama as “*An inadmissible act of outstanding international gravity-the U.S. aggression against the republic of Panama...All the much more reprehensible are the U.S. actions of brutal aggression as they were taken against a small state which defends its independence and freedom violated by a superpower...It is the sacred right of each people to decide its own way of life, its political regime, according to its aspirations and traditions...By stating its solidarity with the Panamanian people’s fight for the independence of its country, the Romanian people firmly condemns the U.S. armed intervention...and asks that an end be put forever to the colonialist, imperialist policy of domination and dictate, of interference in the home affairs of peoples.*”⁸⁷ An East German news agency ADN spokesman named Denis Ruh warned that East Germany was “*deeply worried*” about the US invasion of Panama. The Czechoslovak Communist Party newspaper Rude Pravo noted that the US invasion of Panama was “*a big nation’s aggression against a small country and an attempt to gain its interest through brutal military force.*”⁸⁸ The Bulgarian Foreign Minister Boiko Dimitrov condemned the US invasion of Panama as an act “*in contradiction with the principles of international law, with the UN Charter, it is in contradiction with civilized norms of international relations which are affirmed in the contemporary world.*” The Bulgarian communist newspaper Workers Cause also criticized the US invasion of Panama.⁸⁹

during the invasion of Panama, the Sandinistas ordered troops and tanks to surround the US Embassy in Managua. During this time, thousands of Cuban Communists marched and protested outside of the US Interests Section in Havana. Rows of loudspeakers blared patriotic songs and anti-US slogans outside of the US Interests Section in Havana. One communist speaker stated “*Let’s say it in English, so they can understand us clearly: Yankee, son of a bitch.*”⁹⁰ The Colombian M-19 terrorists noted that upon request, they would go “*into combat in the trenches of Panama.*” An M-19 spokesman noted that his organization “*feels in its own flesh the aggression against Panama. It is like it was in our own home.*”⁹¹ A FARC spokesman noted that “*we have decided to declare all multinational concerns and those with US capital as*

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Responses to US action in Panama” BBC Summary of World Broadcasts December 22, 1989

⁸⁷ “Romania Condemns U.S. Invasion of Panama as ‘Brutal’” The Associated Press December 21, 1989

⁸⁸ “East European Nations Against US Invasion of Panama” Xinhua December 21, 1989

⁸⁹ “Bulgaria Critical of US Invasion of Panama” Xinhua December 21, 1989

⁹⁰ “Administration Draws American Support, Denunciations Abroad” Washington Post December 22, 1989 page A33.

⁹¹ Ibid.

military targets without losing sight of all that they represent.”⁹² In Chile, the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front threatened “*to attack any North American target in Chile.*”⁹³ The Manuel Rodriguez Front’s spokesman noted that “*we categorically reject and condemn the United States’ terrorist invasion of Panama. We have permanent contact with the Battalions of Dignity... We call on the people of Chile to protest actively, demanding the immediate departure of the invaders. We declare that from this moment we are free to act, to strike effectively at every US target in the country.*” The Chilean Communist Party noted that America’s intention in Panama was the “*toppling the government of General Manuel Noriega, killing him and replacing him with a regime glued to the pentagon.*” A group of leftist Chilean students held a protest in front of the US Embassy in Santiago.⁹⁴

In conclusion, the Noriega dictatorship was aligned with the interests of the international anti-American axis as a result of the following factors:

- 1) Ideological adherence to the leftwing nationalism of Torrijos.
- 2) Influence of the extreme Left and the PDP on Noriega’s regime and the ruling PRD.
- 3) Increasing American opposition to the corruption, drug trafficking, and human rights violations of the Noriega dictatorship.
- 4) Pressure exerted by communist partners such as Cuba.

While Noriega served as an intelligence asset for the CIA, his loyalty to the American-led anti-communist alliance was questionable in light of his unstable personality and political opportunism. Noriega’s political capital soared under the anti-US, pro-Cuban dictatorship of Brigadier Omar Torrijos. The Panamanian colonel viewed himself as a loyal executioner of the legacy of Torrijos. In light of these facts, a valuable lesson learned from the Noriega experience is America’s need for very careful discretion in the recruitment of intelligence assets in sensitive regions of the world.

⁹² “Colombian Guerrillas Threaten to Attack Multinational Corporations” Xinhua December 27, 1989

⁹³ “Administration Draws American Support, Denunciations Abroad” Washington Post December 22, 1989 page A33.

⁹⁴ “Guerrilla Group Threatens US Targets in Chile” Xinhua December 21, 1989