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THE GENERAL OF THE PEACE

A Contemporary History of the Regime
of
Manuel Antonio Noriega

by

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Thought that you might be interested!
Josh

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A Contemporary History of the Regime of Manuel Antonio Noriega

During the late fall of 1903, the United States, though not entirely without its own selfish interests at heart, intervened militarily upon the Isthmus of Panama and, by doing so, ensured the independence of the Panamanian state. Now almost eighty-five years later, it may become necessary for history to repeat itself. In 1903, Panama clamored for independence from Colombia. In 1988, Panama is struggling to rid itself of dominance from Colombia once again, but instead of political dominance from Bogota, it fights to remove the stench that is associated with the Colombian drug cartel which threatens its very independence.

Drug smuggling, gun running, money laundering, and other activities normally identified with organized crime have been linked to Panama's self-proclaimed "General of the Peace," General Manuel Antonio Noriega. These activities have allegedly financed the general to such an extent as to insulate him from economic vagaries and firmly entrench him in power. The true importance of the revelations from his former cohorts is as a means to try to understand what makes him tick.

Manuel Antonio Noriega had been the head of G-2 (intelligence) for some years prior to the death of Panama's previous military ruler, General Omar Torrijos. Where Torrijos was beloved by many Panamanians, especially the

campesinos, Noriega was the most feared man on the isthmus. Torrijos warmed their hearts; Noriega chilled their very souls. Noriega compiled information on persons with power, persons who had had power, and those who appeared to be in position to obtain power. It was a common tenet that telephone conversations in Panama were monitored. Information was his stock and trade and he owned the bank of that currency.

Immediately upon the death of General Torrijos, a death of suspicious origins, a power struggle ensued among the three top officers of the Guardia Nacional (now called the Panamanian Defense Forces, or PDF), General Ruben Paredes, Colonel Roberto Diaz Herrera, and Noriega. Since Panama has only one armed force of any kind and that force is not accountable to civilian authority, the prize to be won in this struggle was the *de facto* control of the country. Panamanians are, by nature, non-violent and this situation proved to be no different. It was resolved by an agreement, reduced to writing according to Jose Blandon at recent hearings before the Senate sub-committee on narcotics, wherein each of the parties was to have his turn at the helm. General Paredes acceded to Noriega in 1983 and Noriega was to relinquish control to Diaz Herrera in June, 1987.

Once established as the power in Panama, Noriega allegedly began his illicit activities in earnest. In 1984, while on the payroll of the CIA, he is accused of having protected operations of the Colombian cartel in Panama. These

operations included a processing plant for cocaine within the jungles of the Darien province, as well as providing and protecting facilities for the distribution of cocaine through Panama. As the general elections of 1984 drew near, political pressure from within necessitated a show of some strength in the war against drugs. Noriega, a master of playing both sides against the middle, also seized the opportunity to bolster his image with the CIA and DEA. Thus, he raided the Colombians' processing plant (which he was protecting), confiscated the equipment, kept the protection money, and arrested some 23 Colombians.

However, the cartel does not take such double-crossing too lightly. The assassinations of various political officials in Colombia vividly illustrated both the cartel's power and absence of fear from reprisals. This demonstration was not lost upon Noriega and he was understandably concerned. Nonetheless, he transformed this crisis into an advantage by enlisting the aid of another powerful individual in the Latin American community, Fidel Castro. Through Castro it is alleged that he was able to temporarily mend his break with the cartel- returning its property and personnel, ingratiate himself with Castro, and begin to sleep a bit better at night. Additionally, he was able to maintain his claim that he had not released one Panamanian convicted of a drug-related crime, showing his "strength" in the war on drugs to his countrymen. And although he had returned some $5 million to the cartel, he was still making money as if he had personal keys to the mint. In the process, he had acquired a

taste for luxury, one that he will not relinquish readily.

Meanwhile, back in Panama, the general elections were about to begin and that perennial foe to the PDF, Arnulfo Arias, was the odds-on favorite to be elected president. Noriega was not about to let that happen. It is widely believed in Panama that Noriega ensured this result by rigging the elections which placed Nicolas Barletta in the Presidential Palace. With this ploy, Noriega felt that he had solidified that which he demanded, total control.

In a moment of overkill, however, he allegedly sent a message to the opposition. This message was both graphic and symbolic in its execution. A popular opposition leader, Dr. Hugo Spadafora, was decapitated, his headless body stuffed into a mail sack, and, finally, deposited just within the Costa Rican border. This was a hit, Panamanian style, with all the brutal earmarks of Noriega's effectiveness as G-2.

As a result of the hue and cry of the opposition and pressure from the United Nations exerted upon Barletta while on a tour there, President Barletta announced from New York the formation of an independent investigation into the assassination. General Noriega would not tolerate such interference or independence. As a result, he removed Barletta from office and swiftly installed the vice-president, Eric Arturo Delvalle in his stead.

By such actions, Noriega demonstrated his tenacity and resolve to maintain power. Power is Noriega's obsession and one that he would never relinquish voluntarily. Colonel Diaz

Herrera read these signs realizing that Noriega had no intention of living up to the previous agreement which would leave Diaz Herrera out in the cold. His only hope to attempt to force Noriega to fulfill the bargain was to go public with the details of Noriega's nefarious deeds, including some unanswered mysteries concerning the death of the popular Torrijos, crystallizing a burgeoning opposition. Unfortunately, he overestimated the potential strength of the civilian opposition and underestimated that of Noriega and his PDF cadre.

The burning question is, "From where does Noriega draw that power?" The fact that there is only one armed force of any kind not only concentrates that immense power in one leader, but also lends itself to institutionalized corruption. Without any checks from other organizations, members of the PDF can elicit bribes and other perks from the general populace at will. This problem is so inbred that it reaches down into the ranks of non-commissioned officers. Thus, any attempts to bring a sense of ethics into the PDF would and has been met with extreme resistance. One must remember that the president rules Panama at the discretion of the PDF and that is a fact of life in Panama, one that has been in existence for decades.

Nonetheless, the accusations of Diaz Herrera did accomplish the first demonstrations against Noriega's regime. White handkerchiefs and white clothing became the symbol of the opposition and were seen with greater frequency throughout the country. But Panamanians are not a violent

people, almost to the point of being passive. Their idea of demonstrating is to climb into their air-conditioned cars, stop traffic and blow their horns while waving their handkerchiefs. Those without the luxury of having a car at their disposal, bang pots and pans from their apartment windows. These techniques are utilized so that a hasty retreat can be made when confronted by the PDF. The PDF are known not only for having the only weapons in Panama, but for their non-reluctance in using those weapons in a brutal manner. Against such a foe, discretion is not only the better part of valor, it is a matter of sheer survival. The fact that any demonstrations took place is a testament to how much Noriega is reviled in the country he rules.

Rather than produce any type of proof in his defense, Noriega went on a two-pronged attack. His first front for attack was his accuser. He tried to discredit Diaz Herrera by questioning his physical and, implicitly, his mental health. Then, he arrested Diaz Herrera on some ambiguous charge against the state. After some extensive "interrogation", Diaz Herrera recanted. Once freed and safely out of the country, he renewed his charges stating that he was forced to recant by Noriega.

Simultaneously, Noriega began a diversionary campaign. He began blaming Panama's old nemesis, the United States, for his problems. This was a natural tactic because it is endemic to the *macho* personality of a *caudillo* to never take the blame for any misfortune. It would also prove to be an

effective tactic in its own right in that it took the focus of the problem away from what Noriega had done to the United States' interfering in Panamanian affairs by their attempts to remove him. Noriega claimed that the U.S. was using these charges as a means to abrogate the Carter-Torrijos treaty giving Panama total control of the Panama Canal at the end of 1999. In late June, Noriega then staged a violent demonstration against the U.S. Embassy in Panama City. Although the transition of power over the canal is contingent upon the establishment of a stable, democratic government in Panama, the U.S. has demonstrated restraint and intelligence by not making this a public issue in this crisis.

The next stage was set up by the unique relationship between Panama and the United States. One of the more interesting by-products of the construction of the Panama Canal and the establishment of the Canal Zone was the use of a single currency for the two states. What Panama relinquished in economic independence it gained in economic stability. By doing so, Panama became a banking center; trading upon its supply of U.S. dollars, its position as a hub within the international shipping world, its geographic location, and very secretive banking laws designed to protect the identities of its investors. So long as Panama enjoyed the backing of the United States and maintained a stable political environment, depositors enjoyed the best of both worlds; security and privacy. Still, Panama was without its own, firm foundation of support. A loss of faith in the security of its investment would cause a rapid exodus of

funds by the depositors.

As pressure to oust Noriega increased and investors began withdrawing significant amounts from Panamanian banks, President Delvalle began to envision this effect upon the delicate balance of Panama's financial condition. Only the ouster of Noriega would rectify the situation. At the same time, Delvalle recognized that the situation also presented him a prime opportunity to shake off the mantle of "Noriega's puppet" and establish his own place within Panama's political spectrum. For Delvalle, if he physically survived Noriega's reprisals, it was a no-lose proposition.

Should Noriega actually acquiesce, Delvalle would become Panama's savior for ridding it of this despised despot. However, should Noriega remain true to form, Delvalle would become the focus for the opposition, a central figure for the many opposition factions to rally behind. All Delvalle had to do was to survive, remain in Panama in defiance of Noriega, continue to speak out against the General, and hope that the United States would expeditiously excise this cancer.Thus, he summoned his courage and the general and announced that he was removing Noriega from his position in the PDF.

As expected, Noriega reacted accordingly. He summoned those members of the National Assembly upon whose allegience he could rely unquestionably and called an impromptu meeting quite late that very evening. This resulted in the attempted removal of Delvalle from office. Rather than appoint Vice-President Escovil to succeed Delvalle and without actually

voting to remove him either, Noriega had previously locked Escovil out of his offices and had his own candidate selected by the hand-picked delegates. The "new" president of Panama was to be Manuel Solis Palma, the former head of the communist party at the University of Panama and then Minister of Education. The message was loud and clear- Noriega was dug in for the duration and he was spitting in the eye of the United States who he believed was behind Delvalle from the outset.

One of the by-products of our democracy is that no one person, nor one office, can control the workings of the whole government. While this is a great comfort to the citizens of this country, it also renders a coordinated effort among the various branches and offices of the government difficult at best and impossible by this administration in this situation. This became apparent when the Justice Department pushed for and received indictments against Noriega. Although warranted, the indictments served little purpose other than to crystallize Noriega's resolve not to buckle under the demands of the U.S. The public nature of the indictments forced him to remain in Panama, where there is no extradition treaty with the U.S., in order to save face. Without such a treaty, the efforts of the Justice Department stood for little more than showboating. It later proved to become a bargaining chip in negotiations with the general, albeit controversial at best. Further, it is rumored that the Medellin cartel has issued a contract against Noriega should he leave Panama. This very real threat

to his personal survival has entrenched him against leaving the isthmus.

By remaining in Panama, Delvalle also provided the United States with its first avenue to actually attack Noriega on his home turf. As the recognized head of state, he has been able to spearhead a legal battle preying upon Panama's reliance on the dollar. By petitioning the U.S. District Court to freeze his country's assets in this country, he has helped cut off the supply of money to Panama. At the same time, the Reagan administration began placing payments due to Panama into an escrow account at the request of the recognized head of Panama, Eric Arturo Delvalle.

The banks in Panama, displaying both their foresightedness concerning the financial situation and their disdain for Noriega, began changing their procedeures. Prior to this time, the banks had been sending their deposits to banks in the U.S. by special couriers on a daily basis. After having a few of these couriers intercepted by PDF officers and their cash confiscated, Noriega's method of dealing with an impending cash crunch became clear. Rather than have Noriega and his PDF cronies attach this cash, the banks would record the serial numbers of their dollars, shred the bills, and report this action to the U.S. Treasury Department for full credit via electronic transfer. This, in turn, would enable the Banks in Panama to transfer deposits to the U.S. electronically as well. This tactic literally robbed Noriega of the opportunity to stockpile millions of

dollars. The next logical step was to close the banks.

With the banks closed and the government's own supply of dollars limited, the first confrontation was imminent. Noriega's only allies outside the PDF were among the government workers and pensioners who depended upon the general for their financial support. Since the banks were closed and merchants were not accepting checks for payment, it became imperative for the people to obtain cash for subsistence. The pensioners were the first to experience the effects of the economic squeeze play.

Noriega needed to stretch his resources to appease a large number of pensioners. In order to assist the greatest number, he limited these payments to a percentage of their allotment. However, a sizable group were retired from working with the U.S. government, i.e. Panama Canal Company, Panama Canal Commission, or Department of Defense. The U.S. Southern Command was directed to cash these checks at full value generating a bit of good p.r. for Uncle Sam. The joke making the rounds told of an elderly gentleman becoming so frustrated with the long lines to receive only a partial payment that he asked his compadre next in line to hold his place while he was going off to kill Noriega for creating this mess. A few minutes later he returned more agitated than before. His friend asked him why he came back so soon to which he replied that the line for those wanting to murder the general was twice as long as this one.

The Panamanian government workers fared no better. In fact, they did not have the option of a helping hand from the

U.S. Only members of the PDF were paid in full from a source of money of mysterious origins. Of course rumors ran rampant that Noriega was being bankrolled by such characters as Moammar Gaddafi, Fidel Castro and the Russians through Daniel Ortega. None of these connections have been proven, but the Libyan ties still persist, as well as clandestine military support from Cuba. Nonetheless, with the supply of cash dwindling to a trickle, the merchants of Panama were feeling the pinch. They felt they had nothing to lose by staging a general strike, so the National Crusade set those wheels in motion.

At this point, it must be noted that this reoellion was unique in its cast of characters. This was not a class struggle where the downtrodden had little to lose by opposing the system. Nor was it instigated by idealistic students dreaming of some utopian society. The National Crusade was comprised of businessmen, the Chamber of Commerce, middle class citizens who had everything to lose by conducting such a struggle. These were not soldiers or even street fighters. They were not accustomed to facing well-equipped riot police who did not hesitate to use whatever weapons were at their disposal. One could say that the situation resembled that of a high school football team playing the L.A. Raiders in the Rose Bowl. The initial spirit may be there, but at the first hit it is, "Run for your lives." Regardless, it took courage to take that first step. Thus, for a little over a week Panama was laid off.

During this period, Noriega survived a half-baked coup attempt throwing kisses to newsmen after the affair. He continued his haranguing of the United States in front of crowds plied with free food and drink, as well as international journalists. Even this public support appeared to be solely for the benefit of the television audiences both at home and over the satellite feeds. International opinion was clearly anti-Noriega and the general strike generated broad based sympathy.

Although gaining support from the outside world and the previously neutral Catholic Church, insufficient planning and provisions were made for a long term strike. The merchants' resolve was teetering as they needed the basic necessities themselves. Noriega then announced that he could not blame people if they took what they needed from the closed shops, which was tantamount to an invitation to loot. Additionally, he indicated that he would institute a new health inspection procedure for businesses that would require new permits, taking months and considerable amounts of cash to obtain, before they could open. The final act occurred when a flour mill began distributing surplus flour to the poor for free, the PDF appropriated all of the nation's flour supply,requiring cash to purchase it, sealing the demise of the strike.

Having broken the strike, Noriega still remained in control. The United States, on the other hand, needed a fresh point of attack. The PDF, Panama's army, navy, air force, and police, consists of approximately 15,000 troops together

with about six tanks, a like amount of helicopters, and a few small boats. The United States has one Air Force base (Howard AFB) and a satellite air field at Albrook Air Force Station, naval facilities at Rodman, a marine contingent based out of Quarry Heights, three Army bases (Fts. Davis, Clayton, and Kobbe) as well as a jungle training school at Ft. Sherman, for a reported total of 10,000 troops. Concurrently with the announcement of the first economic sanctions against the Noriega regime, the U.S. sent approximately a small contingent of military police to assist in securing the canal. With the apparent failure of the general strike, the Reagan administration stationed an additional 300 troops in Panama.

Ostensibly, this was intended to be a show of force without being so heavy-handed as to agitate other OAS countries. However, at the same time the U.S. had deployed a much larger number of troops to Honduras for "training" immediately after an incursion into that country by the Sandinistas. The result of these two moves was to antagonize our Latin American neighbors, give Noriega fuel for more anti-American rhetoric, and prove to be little more than a mere insult to the pro-American Panamanians who were clamoring for more decisive American intervention.

Two firefights at a tank farm on the edge of Howard Air Force Base, in which one marine was killed in a cross-fire with his fellow soldiers, only served to weaken the image of Uncle Sam's power. Although never officially confirmed,

reports from locals of the presence of soldiers that did not speak the Panamanian dialect and other physical evidence found in the jungle near the tank farm suggested that the intruders were Cuban soldiers. That physical evidence was reputed to be some bloody bandages and a body of a soldier that was neither Panamanian nor American. Inough briefly mentioned on CNN, further reports appear to have been suppressed . No trace of the intruders was ever made public, giving apparent credence to Noriega's claim that the marines were shooting at palm trees.

Typically, the general overplayed his hand. He began "recruiting" a militia of civilians to thwart the coming invasion of the gringos. This rag-tag group was paraded out in the vagaries of civilian dress carrying wooden rifles with each soldier marching to the beat of his own drummer. This was staged to instill patriotism and anti-Americanism in Panamanians as well as garner sympathy for his cause against the great behemoth from the north. This ploy served as little more than comic relief during this tense period.

Meanwhile, in Washington, the economic sanctions were about to expire on their own. Congress clamored for President Reagan to impose the International Emergency Protection Act (IEPA) in order to prevent Noriega from obtaining additional cash through the payments of taxes and fees by U.S. citizens and companies. The implementation of IEPA would make it illegal for any American to pay any sum of money to a Panamanian government entity or a venture controlled by that governemnt. Although the swift enactment was the logical

progression in this production, the administration waffled, waiting until the proverbial eleventh hour to institute the act. The official explanation for the delay was the administration's reluctance to utilize a weapon that would severely damage Panamanian busineses and, concurrently, the relationships between Panamanian and U.S. businesses.

Actually, what the delay demonstrated was the administration's philosophy of handling the entire matter. That philosophy can best be described as doing the very least necessary to achieve the desired result and waiting for as long as possible before trying something else. No long term plans were apparent; no contingencies readied for any given occurrence. This philosophy conveyed a message of indecisiveness and weakness that emboldened Noriega to withstand the pressure for his ouster.

An interesting example of this failure of long range planning is found in the administration's dealings with the U.S. civilian personnel in Panama during the 10-day strike and its implementation of the IEPA policies. When the economic sanctions were first imposed without the restictions of IEPA, Noriega was able to force U.S. corporations to pay certain taxes and fees to his government easing his cash flow crisis. At the same time, the administration refused to open military commissaries and PXs to the U.S. commission workers so that they may obtain necessities.

These civilians were caught in a ticklish crossfire. They

were advised not to go into Panama City to try to buy food as it was extremely dangerous for Americans to be seen there. Yet even though so advised, the only other avenues of purchasing such necessities were the commissaries and PXs, which were also off-limits. What was particularly galling was the fact that PDF officers and their families were given a free reign to utilize these facilities while other Americans suffered. The official explanation of trying to demonstrate an even-handedness in not giving Americans special treatment did not wash. Some Congressmen, such as W.J. Tauzin and Jack Fields, complained bitterly and the administration relented somewhat by opening the small shopettes on the bases. Although stocked with the rejects of the commissaries and at the considerably higher Panamanian prices, at least some relief was accomplished. As of June, 1988, this is still the situation.

One of the first casualties of this confrontation was Panama's banking system. Prior to the imposition of the first sanctions by the United States, most of Panama's banks were operating in a limited capacity. By the time of the general strike, all of the banks were closed. Some of Panama's government owned utilities were accepting checks written on accounts of the Banco Nacional de Panama for payment, but by April, with the governemnt in such a cash crunch, even these checks were not being honored. Government paychecks and even those of PDF non-coms were being cashed at an extreme discount. In order to appear to break the stranglehold the closed banks had on the cashflow, it was necessary for the

banks to reopen. By the beginning of May a combination of Noriega's pressure and other financial realities forced the openings of some of the banks.

The American media completely misread this re-opening, accepting the government's line without further investigation. Although reported that withdrawals of up to 25% of deposits were being allowed, what was not made public was that withdrawals were limited to 25% of the last amount deposited and that these funds had to be paid to the government-run utilities. Thus, Noriega had devised a scheme to partially finance his government, or at least get it off of life support, through a ruse and the U.S. media bought it hook, line and sinker.

With the apparent failure of economic warfare and increased military presence to force Noriega from Panama, the U.S. next attempted to ease him out through diplomatic negotiations. Various reports had surfaced throughout this situation and many hopes for a resolution were dashed. It appeared for quite a while that with each new attempt to negotiate a settlement,a different State Department underling represented the United States. Eliot Abrams, the administration's chief architect for Latin American foreign policy, made only a brief appearance at the scene. Although ostensibly drawn to more pressing matters concerning the Sandinista-Contra cease fire in Nicaragua, as well as answering questions about his own involvement with the funding of the contra movement, it was widely believed that

his superior, arrogant nature rendered any meaningful negotiations with the Panamanians impossible. Panamanians are not an aggressive people and Abrams made the classic miscalculation of equating this non-aggressiveness with a lack of purpose and pride. Unfortunately for the United States, this superior attitude has pervaded Abrams' dealings throughout Latin America and has severely limited any attempt, if any actually has been made, to develop an effective policy through the region.

Abrams most visible replacement has been Michael Kozak. Whereas Abrams exuded a personality of smuggness, Kozak appears to come from the other end of the spectrum. However, it may be unfair to characterize Kozak from the very limited range of options open to him by the administration at the time of his involvement. By the time he came upon the scene, Kozak was reduced to the role of a contract actor forced to play a part without any say in the script. On top of that, the role he was to play had absolutely no definition.

One of the problems Kozak faced was to reconcile the myriad of signals sent to Panama by the various factions of the Reagan administration. For example, at the outset of the crisis, Secretary of State, George Schultz, advocated the very strong presence and possible use of the U.S. military to expedite the removal of Noriega. Secretary of Defense, Frank Carlucci, on the other hand, argued against the deployment of combat troops to the region stating that he was afraid of a prolonged activity, *viz.* conflict. Considering that Noriega has no popular support, that the majority of Panamanians are

pro-American, that Panama has a relatively small population (2.2 million, the majority of which are concentrated in Panama City), that Panamanians are traditionally non-violent, and that very few weapons are present on the isthmus other than those of the armed forces, the likelihood of any armed conflict is extremely remote. This has become an example of the "Vietnam Guilt Syndrome" at its worst because their are no similarities of any significance between the two scenarios. The real significance of this open divergence of opinions within the administration was that it conveyed a confused and irresolute attitude in concluding the matter. Noriega was not convinced that the United States had the courage to back its stated goal of doing whatever it takes to remove him from Panama.

Noriega's prolonged defiance of the United States was a growing embarassment to the Reagan administration. As the summit meeting with General Secretary Gorbachev drew near, it became imperative for President Reagan to direct both Congress' and the nation's attention to the INF treaty, the hope for additional nuclear arms reduction and the "Bear in the East" and not to allow a "Piss-ant in the South" to dilute its importance. In what appeared to be a desperate move, Kozak was sent to Panama City in mid-May to offer Noriega a deal he could not refuse. Against the vehement opposition of the vast majority of Congress and public opinion, the administration stood ready to drop the indictments against Noriega in return for his retirement from

the PDF in August as well as his taking a vacation out of Panama until after the general election in Panama next May. Additionally, Noriega's hand-picked successor, Manuel Solis Palma, was to be guaranteed a position in the "transition government" and his cadre of officers would remain to maintain their status quo. The United States had virtually conceded to every demand by Noriega. The sole saving grace to this tactic was in establishing a deadline after which all offers would be withdrawn.

Throughout the crisis one trait has remained constant. Noriega did what was best for Noriega. He has watched his country become bankrupt, his people go hungry, his name become an obscenity throughout the world; he has no conscience. His greed, brutal nature, and illicit activities have come to the world's attention. He has become the personification of how Lord Acton describes absolute power and, like such men, will automatically refuse to be dictated what to do. Thus, although Noriega could have probably placed himself into a position to rule Panama as its elected president in 1989, his pride overruled common sense in his refusing of the United States' offer. He had all the appearances of having beaten back the yankees, why should he step down? By negotiating in such a manner, the U.S. was telling Noriega that he had withstood all that Uncle Sam would throw at him.

Noriega has remained faithful to only himself, cloaked within the guise of patriotism. He claims that the United States was interfering in the internal politics of Panama,

continuing its imperialistic attitude toward the country which had housed what was arguably the United States' last colony. Had his illegal activities only been committed in Panama, the United States would have had no standing to so directly interfere. Nonetheless, his activities reached our shores subjecting him to our jurisdiction and our scrutiny.

With Noriega's rejection of this latest offer, it was back to square one. Given the opportunity of a second chance, we should review and analyze our previous attempts in an effort to expeditiously resolve the situation. The first step is to understand your enemy.

Manuel Antonio Noriega is a ruthless, obsessive, cruel and crude despot. The term "thug" has been bandied about so often as to become synonymous with Noriega. This, unfortunately, does a disservice to the man and perpetuates a dangerous misconception. A thug is generally perceived to be someone who preys upon others solely by brute force; the muscle behind the brains of a gang. For Noriega to have survived for so long while double-crossing everyone in his path, demonstrates a conniving nature educated in the streets of Panama. Although he lacks sophistication, it is apparent that the Reagan administration has drastically underestimated his capabilities.

Comparisons with the situations in the Phillippines and Haiti have been prevalent among analysts of the situation. Reliance upon these supposed similarities is misguided at best. While it is true that the economic situation in the

Phillipines precipitated Marcos' downfall, any other attempt to draw an analogy to Panama is unfounded because the economy of Panama was, until this February, strong. Marcos did not and could not control all of the armed forces in a manner like Noriega. Nor does Noriega face a second front as the communist and Muslim guerrillas in the Phillipines. Two additional disparities exist in that, one, the Phillipines had a popular opposition leader to rally behind and, two, a general election was conducted before the world press so as to ensure that Corazon Aquino would get as fair a shake as possible.

Haiti, although in closer geographic proximity to Panama, still is a world apart from Panama. Haiti's people were as downtrodden as any in the world; they had nothing to lose. Again, Jacques Duvallier did not wield absolute authority over his armed forces' officer corps; he did not even command their respect. "Baby Doc" inherited his power, he did not earn or understand how to maintain it. Essentially, Duvallier would rather run than fight. Noriega is not cut from that bolt of cloth.

In understanding Noriega, one must realize that whatever efforts are to be made must affect the general personally. Noriega cares only for Noriega. He is not a humanitarian nor has he exhibited any feeling for the plight of the populace. Unless there is a direct, immediate, and substantial benefit for him, any and all arguments will fall upon deaf ears. Realizing this fact is essential in developing a strategy for his ouster.

The next step is to co-ordinate and integrate any and all plans. For all intents and purposes, this is a war. Noriega envisions it as nothing less than a duel to the death. Calling it any thing else is not going to change or hide its true nature. Thus, as in war, a multi-faceted plan of attack, replete with contingencies, must be formulated before any action is undertaken.

A corollary to this is the necessity of presenting a united front. If Noriega believes that there is dissension in the ranks, he will dig in and wait it out. This certainly has been the case to date. Diverse opinion is necessary within the decision making corps, but those opinions must remain within that group and not broadcast. Additionally, any further negotiations with the general must be conducted by an official of sufficient rank as to impress upon Noriega the degree of conviction present within the administration to resolve the crisis upon terms favorable to the United States, including the restoration of a meaningful democracy in Panama.

Another factor must be considered before any action is to be taken by the United States. 1988 is not 1903 and the U.S. can no longer do as it pleases in Latin America without incurring serious repurcussions. All of the nations in this hemisphere interact and, to a limited extent, are entertwined. One action in one country may easily affect occurences within a neighbor. Thus, the input of the other OAS nations is imperative. Consultations should be held with

each foreign minister in the region. At best, we may acquire support and alternative ideas for disposing of Noriega; at the very least, we can assure them that similar interferences would not be attempted within their homeland.

Regardless of whether the United States broadens its economic sanctions against Panama and/or decides to revert to a big-stick policy utilizing the military directly or otherwise, the United States must publicly acknowledge its responsibility to the people of Panama for the entire Noriega saga. The Reagan administration, as well as the camps of the prospective successors, should pledge its support to the rebuilding of the Panamanian economy in specific terms sufficient to encourage Noriega's opposition to continue its struggle. Actually, this tactic serves at least three purposes.

First, and perhaps most important, should Noriega finally become convinced that Uncle Sam means business and will fight as long and as hard as he, such a prize may serve as a graceful exit. Again, one must remember that Noriega's personality is of prime importance in these negotiations. Part of that personality is a gargantuan pride, one that demands the saving of face. Unless it can be made to appear that Noriega has either achieved some measure of a victory or at least dictated the terms of the final agreement, no negotiated settlement will be forthcoming. A word of caution must be offered in that the United States must not equate saving face with caving in. As Noriega has demonstrated a proclivity for the double cross, the U.S. would be wise to

retain something in reserve to ensure his faithful performance.

Second, the acknowledgment of its responsibility in this crisis may make it easier for other Latin American countries to support the ouster of Noriega. One effective tactic in trying a lawsuit is to point out the flaws in your own case and answer them before your opponent has the opportunity to create an environment highlighting those flaws. Such a breath of honesty by the United States should defuse the expected criticism that it is once again trying to buy itself a solution to this embarassment. Additionally, by pointing out that these extreme measures were undertaken only because Noriega directly interfered with the lives of America's youth with his criminal empire, similar incursions within their nations would not be forthcoming.

Third, there is the possibility, although probably remote, that the announcement of a sizable amount of aid being placed at the disposal of the Delvalle government upon the removal of Noriega may spur movement from within Panama to take the situation into there own hands. The individual who brings down Noriega and renews Panama's economy could conceivably become a national hero. Along these lines, an additional affirmation of the United States that it intends to honor the *Carter-Torrijos* treaty would disarm the rumors that Noriega has propagated of intentions to abrogate that commitment. Concurrent with that reaffirmation is the necessity of reminding Panama that the transfer of the Panama

Canal is contingent upon the establishment of a working democracy.

Noriega understands and respects only one thing: power, power directed personally at him. Thus, the United States must exude a convincing resolve to excise this cancer from the isthmus of Panama. Should that entail the presence of additional military, showing the colors as it were, then such a presence should be a substantial one. Should the U.S. wish to escalate the financial warfare, it must do so totally. If there is any sign of weakness, he will not leave voluntarily. Noriega must be convinced that he has absolutely no alternative but to leave Panama or he shall remain entrenched. To do nothing less is to surrender to the general.

Should the U.S. concede to him, it will have compromised its image and position within the western hemisphere, rendered its much-ballyhooed war against drugs impotent, and irretrievably cheapened its judicial system by using it for politically expedient purposes. Answering charges that Noriega was a paid informer on the payroll of the CIA and DEA, all that needs be said is that there is no shame in being fooled by Noriega once; it would be a crime to let him get away with it.

Manuel Antonio Noriega has dubbed himself, "the General of the Peace," but that peace is one of a conquering barbarian whose boot is upon the head of its vanquished, unarmed foe. In reality, he has become the "General of the Bankrupt." The price of that title has been borne upon the

backs of the poor in San Miguelito, the *campesinos* in the interior, and the wretched in Folk's River. As Ambassador Juan Sosa succinctly stated:

> It would be unfortunate for the United States if the efforts to dislodge Noriega failed. It would be a tragedy for the people of Panama if Noriega stays.

For years, Panama has been billed as, "The Crossroads of the World." Now Panama is at its own crossroads with its destiny in the balance.