

The Mosquito and the Colossus: Operation *Just Cause* through the Eyes of General Manuel Antonio Noriega

**A Monograph
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Abstract

THE MOSQUITO AND THE COLOSSUS: OPERATION *JUST CAUSE* THROUGH THE EYES OF GENERAL MANUEL ANTONIO NORIEGA by MAJOR Fernando Guadalupe Jr., US Army, 60 pages.

Panama began its modern history as a semi-colonial appendage of the United States (US). Since gaining independence in 1903, Panama witnessed both elitist quasi-democratic governments and authoritarian populist governments. The oligarchic system in place throughout much of Panama's history was a significant hindrance to real democracy taking hold within the country. Democracy was further set back by the inordinate power exerted by US presence on the isthmus throughout the twentieth century. Many Panamanian leaders would practice duplicity over US and Panamanian relations that benefited their interests when necessary but would also denounce them in the same breath when it fit their local political interests. Through time, many Panamanians felt it created an imperial relationship that the people of Panama saw as overbearing and obtrusive. Today, Iraqis have the same concern as they feel that US intervention was due to imperialistic ambitions over oil.

In the summer and fall of 1989, while the United States had their eyes fixated on the events in Eastern Europe that ended the Cold War, a different kind of storm was brewing in Panama. Noriega's conflict with the US escalated from one crisis to another, gaining him some victories that strengthened his position inside Panama and motivated him to challenge the US even further. From 1988 to 1989 Noriega supported a regime that harassed American citizens in Panama and hindered full implementation of America's rights under the 1977 Panama Canal treaties. As a result, the U.S. launched Operation *Just Cause* on December 20, 1989.

Operation *Just Cause* served as a harbinger of the changes to future conflicts that dawned from the post-Cold War era. The change that came about is the criticality of gaining understanding and knowledge of a region through the study of local interpretations regarding history, politics, and social issues. Initial research shows that very little literature available to American service members presents an adequate Panamanian narrative of the events surrounding Operation *Just Cause*. In this case, the insights of the crisis from General Noriega's vantage point. General Noriega's perspectives provide information for critical analysis of the motivations and interests behind the actions of foreign leaders. With this insight, one can properly frame the problem and achieve some predictive power regarding possible actions by similar regimes. The result is a multi-dimensional view that increases the power of explanation, increases the ability to understand complex problems, and ensures that the United States can develop lessons learned that are applicable to future operational environments.

This study argues that the world's complexity beckons for an understanding achievable only through the study of the local interpretation of historical events. As a result, it is vital to have General Noriega's view of Operation *Just Cause* in order to balance the historical narrative and provide the unique and necessary insights that only General Noriega can provide. This consideration results in a multi-dimensional view that allows one to understand the cultural leadership traits, such as Bonapartism, present in Panama and the challenges semi-authoritarian regimes pose to the US. The result is an increase in the power of explanation, a complete and fair historical record that can truly provide profound understanding of a complex system, and enables the US military to develop lessons learned that it can carry into future operational environments. As such, General Noriega's interpretation of Operation *Just Cause* is a useful study in examining its contributions to the political landscape and the political culture that makes up semi-authoritarian regimes not just in Latin America but also others throughout the world.

Acknowledgments

I would be remiss if I did not begin by thanking my LORD Jesus Christ who has provided me and my family with grace, salvation, hope, and unconditional love. “Commit your actions to the Lord, and your plans will succeed.” Proverbs 16:3.

This monograph would not have been possible without the freedom and opportunity provided by the men and women who have and continue to defend our nation through their service in the armed forces of the United States of America. Thank you for your sacrifice and may we never forget those who have given the last full measure of devotion in the cause of freedom.

I am grateful to General Manuel Antonio Noriega, former commander of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF), for providing me with the interview that became the cornerstone of my monograph and for the professional courtesy he extended to the US Army Command and General Staff College by making himself available for this monograph. As a result, I am especially indebted to Cristina Machin (special assistant to General Noriega’s lawyer Frank Rubino) for making my interview with General Noriega possible in the first place and for serving as a critical conduit between General Noriega and myself. Recognition is also due to Paquita Prieto Pujol (friend, colleague, and American-Panamanian Zonian) and Carmen Mojica de Hannah (friend and non-Zonian Panamanian) for providing such unique and insightful understanding of the realities of Panamanian political and social life along with the splendor of Panamanian culture. I could not go without also thanking Ivonne Marte, Kentucky University Spanish professor and sister-in-law, for taking the time to translate letters and critical research material.

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In conclusion, I would like to thank the United States Army for providing this indispensable course and its talented faculty. This monograph in its entirety holds my own thoughts and conclusions; therefore, all errors within are the responsibility of the author alone.

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INTRODUCTION

Panama began its modern history as a semi-colonial appendage of the US. Through time, many Panamanians felt it created an imperial relationship that the people of Panama saw as overbearing and degraded their sense of autonomy. Many Panamanian leaders would practice duplicity over US and Panamanian relations that benefited their interests when necessary but would also denounce it in the same breath when it fit their local political interests. Today, Iraqis have the same concern. Many Iraqis feel that US intervention was due to imperialistic ambitions over oil. However, Americans have demonstrated the desire to establish democracy in spite of its overarching economic interests.

Background

Latin American expert Michael Conniff writes: “Since the era of Latin American independence, the governments and peoples of the United States (US) and Panama have had constant dealings with one another.”¹ He goes on to explain that although the relationship is not as tempestuous as those with other countries in the area, it is very complex due to the great power-small power relations between Panama and the US.² For the last century, the United States has used its tremendous influence to dictate policy to Panama, who sees their impotency to the US as that of a mosquito to a colossus, as Panamanians sometimes refer to the US.

As the Cold War came to an unprecedented end, a different kind of storm was in Panama. General Manuel Antonio Noriega’s agitating actions toward the US escalated a minor annoyance to a crisis. As a result, the US attempted to come to some type of compromise with him; however, General Noriega always found a way to turn the situation to his favor in an attempt to gain internal victories that could continue to strengthen his political position inside Panama. Things went from bad to worse as Noriega led a regime that harassed American citizens in

¹ Michael Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The Forced Alliance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 1.

² Ibid.

Panama and hindered full implementation of America's rights under the 1977 Panama Canal treaties. The situation became untenable once General Noriega's nefarious activities became known. As a result, the US perceived a serious threat to American security and launched Operation JUST CAUSE in the early morning hours of December 20, 1989.

General Stiner, commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg, N.C. and designated commander of all forces employed on Operation JUST CAUSE, felt the operation helped to confirm the Air-Land Battle doctrine.³ He concluded that there were "no [new] lessons learned during the campaign."⁴ Stiner's assertions were, at the least, hubristic. In reality, Operation JUST CAUSE bore little resemblance to the Air Land Battle doctrine developed in the years leading up to the invasion. The US simply ignored lessons from the military campaign to include failing to learn lessons from the opposition leadership. Ultimately, the US military allowed itself to devolve into an organization of lessons un-learned that it tragically carried into Iraq in 2003. The invasion of Iraq was begun with surprising ignorance about Saddam Hussein and his true intentions. Because of this blind spot, the conflict has become more difficult.

Operation JUST CAUSE is important in relation to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM since it was the last large-scale use of American troops abroad where its forces conducted full spectrum operations against an opposition leader whose true intentions the US misread and sent mixed messages to. Therefore, a study of the other side of the hill is useable to gain some insight into current operations. It is vital to assemble the lessons and insights the US armed forces extracted from the close examination of Panamanian leadership historical narratives that help explain motivations and actions. The result is a multi-dimensional view that increases the power of explanation, provides a complete historical record that can help provide truly profound understanding of a complex adaptive system which allows the US military leaders to properly

³ http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/just_cause.htm (accessed 21 Nov 07) and Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama, February 1988-January 1990* (Joint History: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, 1995), 71.

⁴ Ibid.

frame a problem in its proper context by understanding how an opposition leader thinks, acts, and reacts. Additionally, this insight will help prevent the US from becoming susceptible to developing blind areas of consciousness that prevent it from fully appreciating a situation as it did in Vietnam, Somalia, and now Iraq where opposition leaders were severely underestimated and very misunderstood. The incentive for learning and understanding opposition leaders ultimately is saving American lives.

Research Question

How did General Manuel Antonio Noriega view and assess the American decision to go to war, the military operations in Panama, and its aftermath?

Hypothesis

The world's complexity beckons for understanding achievable only through the study of the local interpretation of historical events. As a result, it is vital to have General Noriega's view of Operation JUST CAUSE in order to answer the research question. This consideration results in a multi-dimensional view that allows one to understand the cultural leadership traits present in Panama and the challenges autocratic regimes pose to the US. As a result, this understanding increases the power of explanation, provides a complete and fair historical record that can truly provide profound understanding of a complex system, and enables the US military to develop lessons learned that it can carry into future operational environments.

Methodology

In an attempt to answer the research question and test the hypothesis, primary sources will be utilized-- primarily written interviews, given by General Manuel Antonio Noriega, who experienced the invasion first hand and was its principal protagonist. A steadfast effort has been made to capture, in his own words, the considerations, viewpoints and intent he had as he experienced the US invasion of Panama in 1989.

Where possible, secondary sources will be utilized to round out some of the themes. A clear, linear pattern of issues does not necessarily fall-out as commonplace between the interviewees. They had very different perspectives and thoughts.

This monograph focuses on capturing and examining the recollections made by General Noriega. His thoughts and recollections provide crucial balance to the written history of Operation JUST CAUSE. General Noriega's view provides the reader with a different lens that provides balance, fairness, and a greater degree of truth to the history. Other sources used in the analysis include government documents relating to the Noriega regime.

The contradictory nature of viewpoints that exists within the literature is of primary interest and the attempt is made to reconcile the competing conceptions of the regime and its impact on Panamanian politics and how it led up to the American invasion of Panama in 1989. Dixon Wecter once wrote of history, "... as an art it must seize upon the durable and significant, firmly rejecting the rest ... [and] if the historian warps his evidence to fit some prejudice or preconceived pattern, he has failed us."⁵

Theoretical Framework

The School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), teaches that one of the 21st Century Warfare imperatives is persistent study in not just areas such as theory, tactics, and strategic communications, but also history and culture.⁶ In the Information Age, local interpretation of history and culture provides military leaders and planners with invaluable insight useful for successful engagement with the local people. United States military personnel must learn to put themselves in the opponent's and local population's place and try to anticipate what they will think and what they will do. This intimate understanding and knowledge will do the US well since it allows it to be more open to evidence and ideas that are at conflict with US held

⁵ Dixon, Wecter, *How to Write History, A Sense of History: The Best Writings From the Pages of American Heritage* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1985), 41.

⁶ Colonel Stefan J. Banach, Director of School of Advanced Military Schools, Lecture, July 2, 2007.

preconceptions and conceivably even provide a certain amount of compassion and respect. Aside from relying on historical, bibliographical, and first-hand accounts relating to the regime and figure of General Manuel Noriega, this study is rooted on the semi-authoritarianism theory provided by Marina Ottaway in her seminal work *Democracy Challenged*. The work on semi-authoritarianism provides the theoretical framework element this writer will use to support and justify studying and understanding General Noriega's perspective on Panamanian history and his interpretation of Operation JUST CAUSE. Ottaway explains how semi-authoritarian regimes rise and challenge democracy in places such as Panama.⁷

Ottaway – Authoritarian and Semi-Authoritarian Rule

Semi-authoritarianism, just like authoritarianism, is seen as the antithesis to democracy.⁸ Rather than having authority rest with the people, the underlying theoretical principle of a democratic system, under semi-authoritarian regimes, political, and usually economic power rests in the hands of one individual or a concentrated group of leaders. Unlike dictatorships that display none of the trimmings of democracy, semi-authoritarian regimes become complex systems, maybe even complex adaptive systems, by displaying characteristics of authoritarian and democratic styles of governance. This makes them difficult for US policy makers to deal with since they exhibit the tendencies, democratic and semi-authoritarian, that sit in what Marina Ottaway calls, "a vast gray zone" where the US finds it very difficult to navigate through now that the Cold War lessened the perceived threat of communism.⁹

Ottaway states that "successful semi-authoritarian regimes are not imperfect democracies; they are stable in their state and do not wish to shift toward democracy; they are purposely-ambiguous systems that are carefully constructed and maintained."¹⁰ The reference to

⁷ Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 2.

⁸ Emma Scribner, "The Omar Torrijos Regime: Implications for the Democratization Process in Panama" (master's thesis, University of South Florida, 2003), 6.

⁹ Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged*, 6.

¹⁰ Ibid.

semi-authoritarianism in the case of Omar Torrijos and Manuel Noriega is because they “were never popularly elected but maintained direct control of the government as heads of Panama’s National Guard.”¹¹ “This military force,” states Emma Scribner, “essentially constituted an unofficial fourth branch of government that remained the most powerful branch from the time of Torrijos’ coup in 1968 up until the forced removal of General Noriega by the US military in 1989.”¹²

The leaders of semi-authoritarian regimes understand all too well how to manipulate people. Thomas Jefferson remarked: “Timid men prefer the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of liberty.”¹³ Semi-authoritarian leaders show up when the people have suffered from democratic failures and willingly, even enthusiastically, reject democracy at least for a time which then allows them to reach that part of society ignored by the previous government and as a result cement the base that serves as the source of their power. According to Ottaway, semi-authoritarian regimes “do all of this in the name of people’s democracy, also known as socialism.”¹⁴ Semi-authoritarian regimes allow autonomous organizations of civil society to operate. However, semi-authoritarian regimes leave very little room for real competition for power, thus reducing government accountability. Furthermore, such regimes become long lasting due to their responsiveness, or rhetorical responsiveness, to social needs and their nationalistic fervor that resonates with most of the people in the country. Panama proved that it could operate under a functioning semi-authoritarian ruler as it cured the social ills the democratically elected elements of government failed to remedy for so long.

History shows that although the US played the role of midwife in Panama’s birth to independence, democracy’s hold on Panama would only be figurative. The oligarchic system in

¹¹ Emma Scribner, “The Omar Torrijos Regime: Implications for the Democratization Process in Panama” (master’s thesis, University of South Florida, 2003), 6.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Famous Quotes, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/thomasjeff157230.html> (accessed December 16, 2007).

¹⁴ Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged*, 4.

place throughout much of Panama's history was a significant hindrance to real democracy taking hold. The elite oligarchy that took control of the country possessed a general frailty that it attempted to compensate for by "economic compliance and by controlling the lower class through the police power of the state itself."¹⁵ In instances where the commercial elite lacked such reliable domestic police support, it has been able to rely on its close historical ties to the US who set democracy back by the inordinate power exerted by it through its presence on the isthmus throughout the twentieth century.

In the end, the elite oligarchy supported by the US held a fragile political position that pushed it to have ambivalent attitudes about "democratic governance." As a result, one can argue that Panama never experienced a functioning democracy since 1903 making it more of an Ottawanian state. The elite's ambivalence and the populist awakening their poor governance created, would force the United States to analyze and alter its foreign policy toward Panama on numerous occasions. The change would include the use of force.

¹⁵ Steve C. Ropp, "What Have We Learned From The Noriega Crisis," *Latin American Research Review*, VOL 28, NO 3, (1993), 191.

HISTORY OF PANAMA

*“A picture without a background is both uninteresting and misleading. Hence, in order to paint you an intelligent picture...as it exists today, we must provide an historical background.”*¹⁶

—George S. Patton Jr.

Pre-Independence

Panamanians distinguished themselves early in their history from other Latin American peoples with their early recognition of the Spanish Conquistadors’ true intentions of conquest and exploitation. While the rest of Latin America initially worshipped the Spanish as gods, the Panamanian Indians, led by the Indian Warrior King *Cacique* Urracá, engaged them in a bitter struggle for freedom that held off the Spanish Empire for more than a generation.

Panamanians recognized early on the significance of their country to the world. The Panamanian isthmus had been a place that shipped people and goods across the isthmus from the Caribbean to the Pacific since the 16th Century. Its location was of such strategic importance, that the Spanish, once they defeated the indigenous people of the area, launched invasions of South America from there. When the Spanish empire collapsed at the turn of the 18th Century, Panama became part of Simón Bolívar’s Gran Colombia.

LTC Kevin Kelly expertly explains how “the United States took an interest in the Panama isthmus in the 1840s; the territory of California had just been won in a war from Mexico and gold was discovered there leading to the historic California gold rush.”¹⁷ He continues to explain how “travel to California by overland route was difficult, lengthy, and dangerous; there was no transcontinental railroad and hostile indians continued to plague the area west of the Mississippi River.”¹⁸ As a result, the United States completed the Mallarino-Bidlack Treaty with Colombia in 1846. “The treaty reduced tariffs on American transit and pledged free international passage on the isthmus in exchange for the guarantee of continued Colombian sovereignty over

¹⁶ George Forty, *The Armies of George S. Patton* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1996), 16. General Patton believed strongly in harnessing the lessons of the past to shape the current battlefield.

¹⁷ Kevin Lee Kelley, *The Panama Canal – A Vital United States Interest?* (SAMS Monograph, 1999-2000), 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Panama.”¹⁹ Subsequently, the US completed a railroad across the isthmus in 1849 to facilitate westward movement, subsequently creating a population boom for California and other western territories.²⁰ For the time being, the US and Colombia were friendly and shared common interests, but that would change.

Alfred Thayer Mahan, a close friend of Theodore Roosevelt, wrote that when a canal was completed the Caribbean-Pacific connection would become “one of the great highways of the world where the position of the United States with reference to this route will resemble that of England to the [English] Channel, and of the Mediterranean countries to the Suez route.”²¹ He felt and wanted to convince policy makers of the great economic potential a strong Navy could provide the US. Mahan used his strong influence and fraternal bond with Theodore Roosevelt to create an American ambition to project America’s new found power and influence to the four corners of the world through naval power. But before America could project its power, a passageway to the Pacific was necessary for his two-ocean projection to truly come to fruition.

The Spanish-American War of 1898 ushered in the US as the undisputed power of the Western Hemisphere; the colossus was unbound. The benefits of a canal to a nation becoming a world power became evident. LTC Kelley explains how “a United States battleship, the USS Oregon, returned from the Philippines to San Francisco and then required sixty-nine days to sail round Cape Horn to join the fleet near Cuba. A canal would have reduced the trip by 8,000 miles and forty days.”²²

Frenchman Ferdinand De Lesseps, builder of Suez Canal fame, entered into an agreement with Colombia to build a sea level canal back in 1879 but failed; the project simply fell victim to disease, poor design, and ultimately bankruptcy once investors started pulling out their funding for the extraordinarily expensive project. In 1902, the US saw a unique opportunity and bought

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 3.

²² Ibid.

De Lesseps' bankrupt company and attempted to complete an agreement with Colombia in 1902 to gain the rights to construct a canal.²³ The US Senate approved the treaty but the Colombian Senate defeated it. Colombia rejected the proposed treaty with the Americans in order to extort a better deal from them. The aristocrats in Bogotá also rejected the idea since it could not bear seeing its power status usurped by one of its colonies and really preferred to keep Panama as a backward hinterland that fed the coffers of Bogotá through its rich natural resources. However, Panama's destiny proved to strong for Colombia to continue to interfere with. Colombia's arrogance prevented it from understanding Panama's determination and America's ambition.

Panama's Annus Mirabilis

The distinguished nineteenth century politician Lord Palmerston keenly observed that "nations have no permanent friends or allies; they only have permanent interests."²⁴ The US would make Palmerston's words their mantra in their dealings with Colombia as it finally decided to lay aside soft power for hard power. The refusal by the Colombian Senate became a decisive point for the US since it was at that moment that the US decided that common interests with Colombia were no longer viable for America.²⁵ Colombian intransigence pressed the United States into backing a revolution in Panama in order to help achieve its independence.²⁶ It was classical balance of power scenario: a weaker nation turn to a great outside power to help them balance a regional threat, Colombia in this case. In 1903, the United States successfully assisted the Panamanian people to gain their independence from Colombia and thus the Republic of Panama was created.

²³ Ibid., 4.

²⁴ ThinkExist, <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/nations-have-no-permanent-friends-or-allies-they/771609.html>, (accessed on 21 Nov 07).

²⁵ Clifford Krauss, *Inside Central America, Its People, Politics and History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 250-251.

²⁶ Michael Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The Forced Alliance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 67.

The stage was now set for the US to gain access to the canal area and realize its dream along with Panama for a transcontinental canal.

Following the successful revolution for independence in Panama, the US immediately sought to make a treaty in order to gain access to the Canal Zone and start construction of a canal. It was at this time that M. Bunau Varilla, a French engineer who remained behind from the days of de Lesseps, and a small group of Panamanian elites negotiated the Hays-Bunau Varilla Treaty with the US. The US paid \$10 million initially and would make \$250,000 payments annually only to begin nine years after the canal was completed plus the treaty granted the US sovereign authority over the ten-mile Canal Zone effectively splitting Panama into two countries.²⁷

The treaty was significant in the US struggle for the canal but the majority of the Panamanians would see the agreement as a betrayal since the Panamanian people had so little say in the negotiations with the US. Conniff explains that “the method of reaching the treaty and the overwhelming advantages obtained by the US under it would sour relations between the two countries for generations.”²⁸ The canal would become an American foreign add-on in the heartland of Panama, from which the colossus of the north would dictate policy to the weak new republic.

Professor Thomas M. Leonard writes: “The Hay-Bunau Varilla Treaty guaranteed Panama’s independence from Colombia, but only after ensuring the interests of the US and the New Panama Canal Company that ran canal operations. The treaty with the US transferred the new republic’s dependence from Colombia to the US.”²⁹ Panamanians may have thrown off the obnoxious yoke of an unsympathetic and oppressive government in Colombia, but they threw off one type of yoke for another; their freedom was a matter of degree since the US exerted its power with impunity within the Canal Zone and the country as a whole.

²⁷ The New York Times, *Special Issue*, November 20, 1903.

²⁸ Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The Forced Alliance*, 70.

²⁹ Thomas M. Leonard, *Panama, The Canal and the United States: A Guide to Issues and References* (Claremont: Regina Books, 1993), 15.

Political Setting

In describing the early days of Panama, Professor Leonard writes:

The first Spanish colonists founded towns and farmed the best land along the Pacific coast.

These interioranos formed a rural oligarchy that controlled both land and the people in their lands. As the port cities developed, they became a very heterogeneous group made up of military personnel, bureaucrats, merchants, artisans, black slaves, and seamen.

These portenos, linked to the isthmian commerce, became more sophisticated and cosmopolitan than their rural counterparts.³⁰

Conflicting economic and political interests not only separated the two groups but also defined the political scene for decades. Panama's new independence never addressed the internal political dynamics that were stressed by the conflict between the rural oligarchy and the urban elite.³¹ From this struggle sprung the Conservative-Liberal struggle. While the mostly white conservatives traced their importance to the *interiorano* elite, the liberals drew their support mostly from the people working around the port cities of Colon and Panama, the *portenos*.³²

The Conservatives were initially very popular since they were the ones identified most closely with leading Panama to independence and gave Panama its first president, Manuel Amador. This background as well as their acceptance of US presence in Panama made them popular to US policy makers contrary to the Liberals.³³ In spite of their struggles, Conservatives and Liberals could legitimately claim credit for a number of political and social undertakings. The Conservatives consolidated independence, introduced a new constitution, and established a monetary system while the Liberals modernized the institutions of law and education to include the country's first university.³⁴ Nonetheless, at the end, the two groups were nothing more than a small, exclusive group of small wealthy families whose members traded the office of the presidency with each other in order to provide undue favors to family members and friends that in

³⁰ Ibid., 9.

³¹ Ibid., 15.

³² Ibid., 17.

³³ Ibid., 16.

³⁴ Ibid., 18.

turn ensured an increase to their wealth and political power. “The victorious president appointed governors, who in turn appointed mayors”, writes Leonard, and “members of the ruling party used their position to grant favors in the form of contracts, concessions, and honorary titles.”³⁵ In short, the Conservative and Liberal movements devolved into nothing more than an elaborate façade of democracy where the elite oligarchy, regardless of party affiliation, corroborated with each other to preserve their hold on the state. Political parties were truly nothing more than family names disguising the elite oligarchy’s personal interests and their power strangle hold of the Panamanian political machine.

Nacionalismo y Personalismo

By the end of the 1930s, the Conservative-Liberal philosophical labels that defined political leaders evaporated from Panamanian politics. *Nacionalismo* (nationalism) and *personalismo* (personalism) became the political norm that gripped Panamanian politics.³⁶ The power of the individuals started to dominate Panamanian politics. Panamanians simply grew tired of the internal abuse, cronyism, and corruption of the elite family regimes as well as of the US involvement in their country and wanted to reach to out to those political people that could best help them. Frustration with the oligarchy and United States became evident and reached a high point with the election victory of Dr. Arnulfo Arias, the first Panamanian leader to exercise *personalismo*. He took power from the elite oligarchy to become Panama’s president in 1940 based on his *nacionalismo* platform. It called for greater Panamanian involvement with canal operations to generate profits for Panama as well as calling for a more homogeneous population that could better develop as a nation under its unique national identity.

Mistakenly, Dr. Arias made turned down American requests for more military bases in the country.³⁷ It did not come as a surprise when the National Police, led by Colonel José

³⁵ Ibid., 18-19.

³⁶ Ibid., 17.

³⁷ Ibid., 25.

Antonio Remón, staged a coup against Arias, with American support.³⁸ This became the United States' modus operandi throughout the Caribbean and Central America for much of the 20th century where disagreeable governments were replaced by more friendly governments. Unsurprisingly, the new government willingly negotiated with United States to receive additional basing rights. It was this incident that opened a new chapter of power politics for Panama. From this point forward, the police and later the National Guard would serve as the approval authority for future Panamanian leaders clearly bypassing and usurping the democratic process and civilian rule of the country and giving birth to the fourth branch of government; something the US and Panama would come to regret.

The Maelstrom

A State Department briefing paper for President Eisenhower stated, “[Colonel José Antonio] Remón is not well educated and lacks experience in international affairs, but is strongly anti-communist and is considered pro-United States.”³⁹ As Remón rose through the ranks to become commander of the police in 1947, he was able to amass great wealth and power and became Panama's de-facto leader through his ability to dictate who could and could not rule in Panama. The instability troubled the US, ironic since the US facilitated Remón's grab for power.

The 1940 coup by Colonel Remón and his reign of power is notable for three reasons. First, it temporarily ended the trend of elite dominance. Second, he transformed the police into the *Guardia Nacional* (National Guard) in 1953. This move transformed the guard into a quasi-military force whose professionalization and militarization grew through military assistance from the US.⁴⁰ Finally, Scribner explains that “as a member of the Panamanian National Police, Remón rose up through the ranks and was able to gain enough support to become President of the

³⁸ Ibid., 25-28.

³⁹ Eisenhower Library, Document 1984-1859 in DDRS (Washington, D.C.).

⁴⁰ Emma Scribner, “The Omar Torrijos Regime: Implications for the Democratization Process in Panama” (master's thesis, University of South Florida, 2003), 38.

Republic in 1952.”⁴¹ He successfully introduced the police and National Guard to Panama’s political framework. This ultimately dealt a deadly blow to any chance of democracy in Panama.

The US would come to regret their role as the midwife of the military’s emergence as a major institutional actor in domestic politics in the coming decades. In 1955, Colonel Remón was assassinated, effectively putting a temporary end to the National Guard’s involvement in politics and allowing the return of the elite oligarchy to power. However, Remón was only a sign of things to come, for another officer would launch a new era of power politics in Panama.

From Remón’s death to 1967, Panama saw relative political stability. The stability was the calm before the storm. The elite family regimes returned but would fall victim to overwhelming socio-economic forces that they did little to alleviate for years. The presidents produced by the elite oligarchies failed to realize the magnitude of their failures as they continually depended on American emergency aid to maintain their mismanaged and shattered economies. The US funded the Panamanian administrations in fear that Panama could fall to communist sympathizers. Add the failure of the elite oligarchy in Panama to build political alliances and the result is the perfect political storm that allowed the oligarchy to become vulnerable to a populist movement that easily pushed it out of power in 1968; thus beginning one of the longest military reigns in Central and South American history.

⁴¹ Ibid.

GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS

“I don’t want to enter the history books. I want to enter the Canal Zone.”
-General Omar Torrijos

Emma Scribner explains that “the 1968 coup in Panama, led by General Omar Torrijos, was seen, among other things, as a reaction to the years of elitist politics that had dominated not just Panama throughout the twentieth century but much of Latin America since the colonial era. Economic and business elites held a disproportionate amount of power in both the political and economic spheres of the country. From the time of independence up to the military overthrow of the government in 1968, minimal effort had been made to incorporate marginalized populations into the political and economic system in the country.”⁴² From 1968 to 1989, politics took on a different nature, instead of the civilian elite oligarchy; military officers became the new power brokers.

The Manifestation of Ideas

Thomas Jefferson said, “Men become ideas.”⁴³ General Omar Torrijos was a man that became a great idea for the Panamanian people. General Omar Torrijos had one of the most important opening acts in the history of Panama. First, General Torrijos truly ended the long reign of the elite oligarchy that ruled Panama for over 100 years. Then, he negotiated the important Panama Canal Treaties of 1977 with the US that would transform him from a mere leader into a living icon who would be proclaimed by his people as the *Líder Máximo* (maximum leader).

Leonard writes that “General Omar Torrijos belonged to a generation of Panamanians that did not experience the independence of 1903.”⁴⁴ However, he still developed an intense nationalism that the US feared and misunderstood.

⁴² Emma Scribner, “The Omar Torrijos Regime: Implications for the Democratization Process in Panama” (master’s thesis, University of South Florida, 2003), 37-38.

⁴³ http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/t/thomas_jefferson.html (accessed 13 Dec 07).

⁴⁴ Leonard, *Panama, The Canal and the United States: A Guide to Issues and References*, 33.

A Coup Like No Other

Torrijos' 1968 coup differed from others in that he sought to add the lower and middle classes to the power base, something not seen in other coups in the region. He did this through his control over the military where many of its members already came from the lower and middle classes. Torrijos also reached out to laborers, small farmers, students, and even the communists in an attempt to build a broad enough base that the powerful elite oligarchy could not penetrate.⁴⁵ Understanding their capability for deceit, he excluded the traditional elite's from political parties, but left their economic power base untouched in order to not start an ill-afforded economic war.⁴⁶ Torrijos justified his policies as being necessary due to the pressing social needs and by the overriding need to maintain national unity as he entered negotiations over a new Canal treaty with the United States.

As the undisputed leader of Panama, Torrijos had the National Assembly grant him extraordinary powers and pronounced him "Maximum Leader" of the revolution of 1968.⁴⁷ Torrijos' brought about the era of the *caudillo* to Panama; a political-military leader at the head of an authoritarian power in the tradition of Simón Bolívar's early Bonapartist style of governance in South America.

Bonapartism

Abusive dictators and military juntas ran rampant throughout Latin America; ruling with iron fists with little or no concern for the welfare of their people. Although Torrijos established a semi-authoritarian rule in Panama, it would not be of the same vein. Torrijos introduced a *Bonapartist* type of regime that drew support both from poor sectors loyal to his populist ideas and from wealthy persons who benefited from his regime.⁴⁸ As time passed, General Torrijos

⁴⁵ Margaret E. Scranton, *The Noriega Years: US – Panamanian Relations 1981-1990* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991), 57.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Gunson and Weeks, *Panama: Made in the USA*, xi.

became a reformist military ruler, a rare phenomenon in Latin America politics that left a lasting legacy the Panamanian people would hold onto until today.

Bonapartism requires the leader to rise above all classes and establish some form of autonomy for the state.⁴⁹ Hal Draper elaborates the principal elements of *Bonapartism* as:

1. ***A military leader that comes to power via a coup.***
2. ***Historical role is the modernization of society.***
3. ***The bourgeoisie trades its political rights and power in exchange for the assurance of economic expansion [and protection].***
4. ***Enforce the interests of the classes even against the opposition of the class itself or against its unenlightened sections.***
5. ***Autonomization of state power.***
6. ***Seeks social transformation.***
7. ***Does not depend on the personal qualities of the dictator in charge.***⁵⁰

Priestly explains: “One implication of this description of the *Bonapartist* state is that, since it is not a captive of the ruling class, the elite oligarchy in Panama, the leader may well act in ways that benefit the heterogeneous middle class from which many military officers come from.”⁵¹

Torrijos definitely understood the importance of this cross-section in Panamanian society and worked hard to maintain harmony among the different ethnic races and working classes in Panama.

The strength of the alliances built by Torrijos was impressive. He reduced the traditional hatred between students and the National Guard and gained the loyalty of the middle classes by increased employment. General Omar Torrijos was in his climax of popularity and power allowing him to now confront the US regarding control of the Panama Canal with the aim of finally making Panama a whole nation.

The Torrijos-Carter Treaties

Since the Hay-Bunau Varilla Treaty of 1903, where a Frenchman not a Panamanian negotiated the treaty for a country not his own, Panama and the US have experienced constant

⁴⁹ George Priestly, *Military Government and Popular Participation in Panama* (London: Westview Press, 1986), 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4-5.

⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

friction and resentment. General Torrijos wanted to shake this leash off Panama once and for all. His partner in America would finally be President Jimmy Carter. Scranton retells how “Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter advocated those negotiations throughout fourteen tough years of on and off talks that took a heavy toll both on the Panamanian and American governments; leaders from both sides suffered substantial political costs to achieve the treaties.”⁵²

The Torrijos-Carter Treaties were achievements of the first order. From a historical perspective, the 1977 treaties marked significant changes in US – Panamanian relations. Torrijos’ critical role in pushing the negotiations to a successful conclusion guarantees him a prominent place in history.⁵³ General Torrijos felt that the Panama Canal Treaties of 1977 were such a great accomplishment that he fell into a deep depression as he came to realize that he could never upstage the great accomplishment achieved through the re-negotiated Panama Canal Treaty.

Torrijos’ Invisible Hand

What does Torrijos have to do with the events that led up to Operation JUST CAUSE? The answer is a great deal. Torrijos would inadvertently set in motion many of the forces that would clash in the mid and late eighties and bring an invading US military force to Panama to overthrow General Manuel Noriega.

First, The Torrijos-Carter Treaties of 1977 were highly controversial especially in the US where the senate ratified it by only a single vote. One of its greatest opponents was future president Ronald Reagan who felt that President Jimmy Carter betrayed the US by negotiating away US rights of the Panama Canal to a “pro-communist government.”⁵⁴ Ronald Reagan expressed the antitreaty tune how the Canal Zone was “sovereign US territory every bit the same

⁵² Margaret E. Scranton, *The Noriega Years: US – Panamanian Relations 1981-1990* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991), 57.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Michael Hogan, *The Panama Canal in American Politics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 86.

as Alaska and all the states that were carved from the Louisiana Purchase.”⁵⁵ As president, one of Ronald Reagan’s top priorities was to re-negotiate the Torrijos-Carter Treaties in favor of the US; this time putting him at odds with a different type of regime in Panama.

Second, Torrijos’s Bonapartist type rule frustrated US policy makers; the US just did not know what to make of it. They felt that Torrijos’ rule and the nationalistic arousal of the Panamanian people were threats to the democratic institutions of Panama and the safety of the Panama Canal. To the US, Torrijos was nothing more than a despot seeking a way to marginalize US influence in Latin America. The US would mistakenly identify Torrijos’ regime in the same manner as Fidel Castro’s communist regime in Cuba. Unfortunately, the US failed to see that Torrijos was a reformist military leader who just held very strong nationalistic sentiments towards his country. Torrijos was a visionary with a passion for political strategy and social conflict and not for military struggle, especially against the US.⁵⁶ The US would also paint General Noriega in a similar vein claiming that he was a drug-trafficking dictator that threatened the peace necessary to continue the safe and undisturbed operation of the Panama Canal.

Finally, Torrijos brought General Noriega into prominence. Noriega’s critical support in the province of Chiriqui allowed Torrijos to regain power in Panama following an attempted coup; as a result, Torrijos took special interest in him and made him a rising star within the National Guard. He initially served as Torrijos’ aide-de-camp and was later promoted to the position of Intelligence Officer Chief (G2) for the National Guard where he quickly gained incredible power and clout throughout the country. As the G2, Noriega developed one of the most comprehensive intelligence networks of Latin America; a network the US used to gain a unique and critical intelligence foothold in Latin America.

The Torrijos-Carter Treaties ratification process taught General Torrijos the difficulties of dealing with the US. He made the transfer of Panama Canal the leading issue before the

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ John Dinges, *Our Man in Panama* (New York: Random House, 1990), 35.

international community and pressured the US into a historic agreement many in Panama and the US thought impossible to accomplish. Nevertheless, he learned an important lesson: the US can only be pushed so far. As a result, he coined an axiom to help steer his followers in their dealings with the US. “The US is like a monkey on a chain,” Torrijos used to say. “You can play with the monkey – but don’t pull the chain too hard.”⁵⁷ Unfortunately, General Noriega would abandon his axiom.

In a Panama country study, Tom Barry argues that “Panama’s transition from Torrijos to Noriega as a shift from a ‘good’ period of leadership followed by a ‘bad’ period of dictatorship under Noriega.”⁵⁸ However, Steve Ropp argues that the Noriega years were more a continuation of Torrijos policies than change: “The fundamental nature of the regime remained the same. It remained military-dominated, inclusionary, and authoritarian.”⁵⁹ Many Panamanians and American policy makers would argue otherwise.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 299.

⁵⁸ Tom Barry, *Panama: A Country Study* (Albuquerque: International Hemispheric Education Resource Center, 1990), 154.

⁵⁹ Steve C. Ropp, “What Have We Learned From The Noriega Crisis,” *Latin American Research Review*, VOL 28, NO 3, (1993), 189-196.

GENERAL MANUEL ANTONIO NORIEGA

“The United States seeks not friends, but servants.”

-Simón Bolívar

On September 9, 2007, General Manuel Noriega, the only prisoner of war in the continental United States, completed his sentence for drug trafficking and racketeering. He served 18 years at Miami's Federal Correctional Institution (FCI).⁶⁰ General Noriega is now to be sent to France where he was convicted for money laundering in absentia.⁶¹ The 73-year-old general, dubbed 'pineapple face' by his detractors, is no longer the figure demonized by the American press back in the 1980s. However, his name still invokes the images of a conniving, amoral dictator willing to do anything to satisfy his hunger for absolute power.

In a recent article for the Guardian, Roy Carroll writes that “the extradition is the latest chapter of a spectacular downfall for one of Central America's strongman and CIA ally as President George Bush ousted him in the 1989 invasion named Operation JUST CAUSE.”⁶² Today, there are very few Panamanians that question the price of deliverance from the Noriega regime. With more than 19 years since the invasion and with more than half the population aged under 30, Panama finds itself a different country. However, General Noriega left an indelible mark on Panama that Panamanians as well as Americans must come to terms with or risk repeating a turbulent and disruptive portion of history once again.

Ego Sum Qui Sum

General Manuel Antonio Noriega hoped to not only follow in the footsteps of his mentor General Torrijos, but also wanted the opportunity to have his own defining place in the history of

⁶⁰ The Guardian, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,2165809,00.html> (accessed December 22, 2007).

⁶¹ Cristina Machin, interview by author, Leavenworth, KS., October 7, 2007. In 1987 France gave General Noriega the Légion d'honneur. France has promised to allow the former dictator to continue to be treated as a prisoner of war.

⁶² The Guardian, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,2165809,00.html> (accessed December 22, 2007).

Panama. At the time of his promotion to head of the National Guard in 1983, General Noriega was asked who he really was by a *La Prensa* reporter. Hubristically, General Noriega answered, “*Ego sum qui sum*, I am who I am. I am Manuel Antonio Noriega. I always have been. I have my personal characteristics. There is nothing enigmatic about me.”⁶³ In Latin, General Noriega expressed his power by describing himself in God’s terms to Moses; a truly Bonapartist response.

General Manuel Noriega, though born in Panama City, really learned about Panama’s rich history and its identity in the small village of Yaviza (his mother’s birth home) located along the border with Colombia where Columbus landed on his fourth voyage to America.⁶⁴ “In Yaviza,” explains General Noriega, “I began to get my earliest historic notion of Panama—who I was, how Panama was formed, the Spanish conquest and colonialism.”⁶⁵ Through the tutelage of his brother, Luis Carlos, Noriega came to learn the critical links between Panamanian history, its destiny as the crossroads to the world, and its long struggle for independence. Luis Carlos passed on to Noriega a Bolivarian outlook; that is, there was “no greater source of political import than Simón Bolívar’s march for Latin American independence in the 1800s...everything was a function of the Bolivarian ideal, Latin America’s cultural independence, its unification, and its freedom from colonial domination.”⁶⁶ Noriega’s nationalism found its grounding upon these principles that laid down a solid foundation for him to build his unique form of Bonapartism in the finest traditions of his heroes Simón Bolívar and General Torrijos.

Similar to Napoleon Bonaparte, General Noriega described himself simply as a “professional soldier.”⁶⁷ However, Noriega did not initially choose this path. After attending the Military School de Chorillos in Lima, Peru, Noriega felt that his calling was as a cartographer; never truly considering life as a soldier.⁶⁸ However, after meeting with Omar Torrijos in the late

⁶³ Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 29.

⁶⁴ Manuel Noriega, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega* (New York: Random House, 1997), 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁷ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

⁶⁸ Noriega, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 23-24.

1960s, he realized that his real calling was as a soldier in the National Guard. Torrijos would re-create and develop into the most respected institution in Panama. To this end, Noriega would go on to create an impressive military résumé. His accomplishments were very respectable: completion of the infantry course, Jungle expert, counterinsurgency training, parachute training, and intelligence training. Additionally, Noriega would become the most infamous graduate of the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, known today as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), where he graduated an impressive number one in his class.⁶⁹

General Noriega admits that his real strength did not lie in his military training but in his experience and the diplomatic ties he so expertly cultivated. He states: “My knowledge and experience of leaders, countries, and having lived overseas provided me an edge that few others possessed.”⁷⁰ Today, many people in the US may find it hard to believe that Noriega was a key US partner who consistently provided invaluable assistance to the US regarding Latin American affairs. He developed this impressive relationship with the US by following a simple philosophy: always telling them the truth, at least his version of it, and visualizing the problems that could arise to threaten the special relationship between Panama and the US.⁷¹ Noriega emphasized that this philosophy was especially predominant in his dealings with the CIA.

Noriega effectively led Panama’s intelligence services during the 1970s and early 1980s. For most of his life, General Noriega got along very well with the CIA and the US government. As the G2, intelligence chief, he dealt with the country's dissidents as well as keeping a pulse in Latin America affairs. Noriega earned a reputation as the most feared and at times, the most respected man in the country. Noriega was successful due to his extensive training in counter-terrorism, narco-terrorism, and the extent of CIA assistance he could request at a moment’s

⁶⁹ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007. The School of the Americas was based in Panama until the Torrijos-Carter treaties of 1977 when it was moved to Fort Benning, Georgia where WHINSEC resides today.

⁷⁰ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

⁷¹ Ibid.

notice.⁷² Furthermore, as an astute officer, he worked very hard to keep the Americans abreast of what Panama was doing; an effort to combat the rumors and misinformation spread about General Torrijos, the country, and the canal; Noriega developed a relationship of respect and friendship that allowed him to speak openly with the US intelligence services.⁷³ For the aforementioned reasons, Noriega became the darling of the CIA in Latin America.

Ascension to Power

In a written interview with the author, General Noriega pointed out that he felt that he was one of the critical actors in Panamanian history. Believing he was the rightful heir to General Torrijos, he felt he was the best prepared person to protect the advances of Torrijos' revolution. He added, "With my vision, I transformed the Panamanian armed forces into a professional organization that could successfully carry out its security role in the Panama Canal. In addition, the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF), for the first time, developed the capability to secure Panama from internal as well as external threats."⁷⁴ His loyalty to Torrijos' principles as well as the vast network of contacts at his disposal made Noriega a formidable opponent to those who dared to challenge him; including the United States.

The death of General Omar Torrijos in 1981 created a tremendous vacuum in Panamanian power politics. Noriega explains in his memoirs that "the National Guard had an established order of succession: first Florencio Florez, Rubén Darío Paredes, Colonel Armando Contreras, and then myself."⁷⁵ With the succession clearly laid out, Florez took command of the National Guard without any struggle and he even continued to carry out the reforms and programs already underway. However, the burden of command turned out to be too much for Florez and Colonel Paredes stepped up and assumed the post of commander in chief of the National Guard. Even so, for Paredes, the power of commander in chief would not suffice.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Noriega, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 108.

In late 1982, General Paredes called a meeting with Contreras and Noriega to inform them that he intended to run for the Presidency of Panama and would therefore resign his command in early 1983.⁷⁶ Further into the meeting, General Paredes announced his successor. “Contreras will not be my replacement,” Paredes said, “he’s arrived at the moment to retire; Noriega will take over the command.”⁷⁷ This pronouncement came as a total surprise to Noriega. He was shocked to be bumped to the head of the line. On August 12, 1983, Noriega assumed the rank of general and commander in chief of the National Guard. Noriega would remember this day as “my proudest day.”⁷⁸

Noriega understood that his power emanated because of the 1968 Revolution brought about by the Torrijos coup. The political, social, educational, and economic revolution brought on by Torrijos finally overcame the abuses of the elite ruling oligarchy that marginalized the Panamanian people in order to enrich themselves and increase their power and influence. Torrijos and others within his regime wanted to ensure that the military would always serve as the protector of the Panamanian people. As a result, the new constitution promulgated at that time provided incredible power to the military; the government would now exercise power in harmony and jointly with the National Guard.⁷⁹ Although this constitutional arrangement made the US very uncomfortable, the Panamanian structure had historical roots. The armed forces were designated to uphold the affairs of state so that laws could be enacted and carried out. Ironically, the US bestowed this arrangement upon Panama. Noriega tells that “since the foundation of the Republic of Panama, the administration of Panama was of key concern and interest to the US; having a commander in chief in charge of public order, blessed by the US starting in 1903, made the canal a lot easier for the Americans to control.”⁸⁰ In Panama, civilian and military power

⁷⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁷⁸ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

⁷⁹ Steve Ropp, *Panamanian Politics: From Guarded Nation to National Guard* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 38. The 1968 Constitution was constructed by General Omar Torrijos.

⁸⁰ Noriega, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 109.

were fated to work hand in hand. General Noriega explains: “Throughout our history, politicians have fallen back on the military as the final arbiter.”⁸¹ This arbitration power served as a temptation the military would not be able to resist. As the leader of the Panamanian Defense Forces, General Noriega ensured for himself absolute control of the nation of Panama.

Although his rise to power was an initial surprise, Noriega did feel ready to fulfill his duties as commander in chief of the National Guard and de-facto leader of the Republic. In his memoirs, he writes, “I had a clear vision of my power in terms of Panama: I understood its politics; I understood my base of support, both within the military and among the masses.”⁸² Noriega wanted to be the leader that would bring Panama from a third world country status into the first. He hoped to do this by first reaching the next steps of self-determination spelled out in the Torrijos-Carter Treaties that supposedly granted Panama true independence from the US. Second, he wanted to expand the canal to allow the Panamanian people to prosper within a greater economical base made possible by the new wealth an expansion to the canal would bring. Finally, Noriega wanted to transform the National Guard into an elite military force capable of defending Panama from all threats.⁸³ Noriega’s self-confidence and close relationship with the US led him to believe that he could easily accomplish the aforementioned goals and more. However, as Noriega will admit, he would make errors in judgment that would slowly sever his close ties with the US.⁸⁴ So, how did it go from so good to so bad?

The Road to Perdition

According to interviews with Noriega, the resulting crisis came in part as a series of misinterpretations on both sides. Between 1985 and the 1989 US invasion, it went through a series of five crises. The major turning point was the United States’ declaration of war on drugs and Noriega’s indictment on drug charges. Eytan Gilboa writes: “The Reagan and Bush

⁸¹ Ibid., 110.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

⁸⁴ Noriega, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 115.

administrations hoped for and preferred a Panamanian solution, like a coup d'etat, an election that would end Noriega's rule, or a popular uprising of the kind that removed from power dictators such as Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua and Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines.”⁸⁵ Gilboa also recounts the strange but necessary relationship the US exercised with General Noriega.

Despite his involvement with drugs, at least until his indictment in 1988, Noriega was considered by the United States both as an asset and a liability. When he committed crimes and abused his power, Washington looked the other way. In 1979, for example, senior officials in the Carter administration blocked federal prosecutors from bringing drug-trafficking and arms-smuggling indictments against Noriega, because they preferred to continue receiving the intelligence information, he was providing them. Following the conclusion of the canal treaties, they did not want to upset the political situation in Panama. With the United States continually ignoring his abuses, Noriega may have been encouraged to continue or even increase his drug-related activities. During the first two years of Noriega's rule, the United States ignored his criminal activities and abuses of the political process in Panama. The US messages may have shaped a belief system that encouraged Noriega to continue the same policies and may have distorted his ability to correctly interpret further US reactions to his behavior.⁸⁶

One can see how the situation worsened between the US and Panama through five crises: the Barletta dismissal; the Herrera confessions; the US drug indictments; the nullified election of 1989; and finally, the Giroldi failed coup.

Barletta Must Go

In September 1985, Dr. Hugo Spadafora, a famous physician and activist, was found murdered before he could expose illegal activities by the Noriega regime.⁸⁷ According to Gilboa, “the media, the Spadafora family, and leaders of the opposition demanded an immediate

⁸⁵ Eytan Gilboa, “The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era,” *Political Science Quarterly* 110, No. 4 (Winter 1995-1996): 540.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 541-542.

⁸⁷ Kevin Buckley, *Panama: The Whole Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 26-27.

investigation and punishment of the murderers. President Barletta condemned the murder and insisted on investigating the case.”⁸⁸

In 1984, Dr. Nicolas Barletta (Noriega’s hand chosen candidate) was declared President in a very close race, the first Presidential elections since 1972. Gilboa states “the official vote count showed Noriega’s handpicked candidate, Barletta, winning by 1,713 votes.”⁸⁹ However, Gilboa posits that “rumors of fraud appeared on election day and persisted in subsequent days and eventually it became clear that the PDF had doctored the election results in order to produce a victory for Noriega’s candidate.”⁹⁰ Regardless, Barletta became secure in his new position since he himself was “underwritten” by his numerous contacts in President Reagan’s administration.⁹¹ Secretary of State George Schultz, who legitimized the election by attending Barletta’s inauguration, knew him as a student at the University of Chicago.⁹² Though Barletta’s election victory was dubious, Washington still proclaimed Barletta’s administration in Panama a successful example of a return to democratic rule.⁹³ However, in 1985, he was forced to resign by General Noriega and was replaced by his Vice President, Eric Arturo Delvalle. Noriega argued that he dismissed Barletta because he was involved in a planned coup attempt with Colonel Roberto Diaz Herrera, the deputy Commander of the PDF. In an admission, COL Herrera did state, “I caused the ouster of Barletta to justify what I had plotted [a coup] against Noriega.”⁹⁴

The Barletta situation is historically important due to some critical reasons. For the first time, a Panamanian authoritarian government overtly reached out to a member of the elite oligarchy for help; in this case with the economy. The economy was in shambles and it was

⁸⁸ Gilboa, “The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era,” 543.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 541-542

⁹⁰ Ibid., 542

⁹¹ Buckley, *Panama: The Whole Story*, 20.

⁹² Gilboa, “The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era,” 542.

⁹³ Buckley, *Panama: The Whole Story*, 20.

⁹⁴ Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 89 and Noriega, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 120.

slowly eroding Panamanian confidence in Noriega. The economic crisis made the Barletta-Noriega arrangement a marriage of necessity. Second, Barletta represented the first real opportunity for the elite oligarchy to regain its political preeminence that it lost in 1968. Although Barletta was a supporter and friend of Torrijos, his pedigree descended from elite oligarchic roots.⁹⁵ He was born into an elite Panamanian family, held a doctoral degree from an elite college in the US, and served as Vice President of the World Bank. He possessed a populist streak that many people compared to the one that Dr. Arnulfo Arias also possessed. Many elitists saw Barletta as a technocrat in the same style as Dr. Arias; a nationalistic type of leader that regardless of the differences in ideology and policy making was still acceptable to the elite oligarchy simply because in the end, he was one of them. In addition, and more important at the time, the coup proved to them that Barletta's affection for Torrijos did not carry over to Noriega. The elite oligarchy that ruled Panama for so long following its independence in 1903 now saw an opportunity to return to a position of political power through the person of Barletta.

Regardless of Noriega's justification for his actions, Barletta's dismissal concerned the State Department, who saw Barletta's dismissal as nothing less than a coup that ran contrary to the American policy of democratization in Central America.⁹⁶ However, Gilboa explains that at the same time, "the CIA and the DEA continued to view Noriega as a vital asset."⁹⁷ This allowed Noriega to conclude that his status in Washington was still well protected. He believed that he had only a few opponents in the State Department who did not realize the valuable contributions he had made to U.S. interests and that his friends in the CIA and DOD would defend and protect him against these opponents.⁹⁸ However, in 1986, the Iran-Contra scandal broke and as a result, Noriega lost his primary protectors: LTC Oliver North and Admiral John Poindexter at the

⁹⁵ Frederick Kempe, *Divorcing The Dictator: America's Bungled Affair with Noriega* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1990), 111.

⁹⁶ Gilboa, "The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era", 543.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Department of Defense and Director William Casey at the CIA. Noriega failed to realize this and would start suffering from a shift in US policy that would no longer overlook his criminal activity as well as his anti-democracy acts in Panama. Noriega himself admitted, "I had said no once too often; I could no longer be trusted. For our part, we started to miscalculate the Americans - we did not understand that the US had become our enemy. We did not understand that the enemy would go to any lengths to control us, to destroy us."⁹⁹

Hell Hath No Fury as a Potential Dictator Scorned

The second crisis between Panama and the US were the Colonel Roberto Diaz Herrera confessions. "According to an internal secret plan signed after the death of Torrijos," Gilboa writes, "Noriega was supposed to retire in 1987, when his deputy, Colonel Herrera, was supposed to replace him as PDF commander. However, on June 5, 1987, Noriega announced that he would remain PDF commander for another five years and assigned Diaz Herrera to an unattractive diplomatic position, leaving him bitter and frustrated."¹⁰⁰ After failing to pull off a putsch against Noriega, Herrera retaliated against Noriega by publicly revealing details about Noriega's crimes. He accused him of organizing and ordering the murder of Spadafora as well as rigging the 1984 elections; he even blamed Noriega for the death of Torrijos in a plane crash, claiming that it was Noriega that placed a bomb in the plane.¹⁰¹

Gilboa now explains how the US slowly started to sever its ties to Noriega:

Herrera's charges inspired massive protests against the government. On 8 June 1987, nearly 100,000 people, close to a fourth of the population of Panama City, demonstrated against Noriega. The opposition formed a new coalition and demanded the immediate resignation of Noriega and other individuals named by Diaz Herrera. Demonstrations and strikes continued for several weeks in both cities and rural areas. Noriega responded by charging Diaz Herrera with treason and by cracking down hard on the demonstrators,

⁹⁹ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Gilboa, "The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era", 544.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

destroying and damaging property belonging to political opponents and shutting down the media. As a result, the State Department suspended military aid to Panama, the DOD reduced military contacts between the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and the PDF, and, most importantly, the CIA removed Noriega from its payroll. The real US goal, however, was to remove Noriega from power either by negotiating his resignation or by encouraging a PDF coup against him.¹⁰²

Drug Indictments Initiate Military Planning

The next crisis to follow occurred in February 1988, when Noriega was indicted by federal grand juries for racketeering, drug trafficking, and money laundering.¹⁰³ Gilboa explains:

The public disclosure of Noriega's involvement in drug trafficking was an embarrassment for the United States. It became clear that US officials had tolerated these activities at a time when antidrug sentiment was at an all time high. Because public concern about drugs was so prominent, the US Government could not afford to be seen as coddling a dictator-drug lord after its own courts called for his prosecution. The indictments created a new crisis in Panama. After days of hesitating, President Delvalle attempted to dismiss Noriega. Under Noriega's instructions, the National Assembly voted to oust Delvalle and replace him with the education minister.¹⁰⁴

As a result, the United States imposed harsh economic sanctions against Panama that consisted of freezing Panamanian assets in the United States, suspending canal payments to the Panamanian government as well as revoking Panama's most favored trade status.¹⁰⁵ The purpose of the sanctions was to erode Noriega's base of support. The US hoped that the financial squeeze would turn his loyalists and the Panamanian people against him.¹⁰⁶ "The sanctions," according to Gilboa, "did in fact succeed in damaging Panama's economy; Noriega failed to meet his financial

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 546.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 547.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 550.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

obligations to the PDF and government workers.”¹⁰⁷ But the pressure was not strong enough to bring Noriega down. The Treasury Department made too many exceptions allowing Noriega to survive once again. Following the drug indictment against him in the US, the other critical event that led to Noriega’s eventual downfall was his nullification of the 1989 elections.

Elections Nullified

On May 7, 1989, Panamanians elected the elite’s candidate, Guillermo Endara, over Noriega’s chosen candidate Carlos Duque. Ronald H. Cole observes that according to monitoring teams from the Catholic Bishops Conference and former president Jimmy Carter, Endara defeated Noriega’s candidate by a three to one margin.¹⁰⁸ However, Gilboa explains that “the PDF managed to ‘win’ the election by seizing ballot boxes, destroying tally sheets, and manipulating the counting process.”¹⁰⁹ All the observer teams agreed about the fraud. Former President Carter went as far as to accuse Noriega of “robbing the people of Panama of their legitimate rights...and hoped there would be a worldwide outcry of condemnation against a dictator who stole this election from his own people.”¹¹⁰ Noriega then decided to nullify the elections resulting in mass protests throughout the country.

The allegation against Noriega was that he nullified a legal election because his hand chosen candidate lost. Noriega presents a different reason. He explains that “his intelligence assets were indicating a complex set of plans by the Americans set up to provoke him as well as the Panamanian Defense Forces into direct confrontation with the US. The CIA, with the tacit approval of the US government attempted to de-stabilize Panama by dumping approximately \$10 million into Noriega’s opposition including illegal campaign contributions into Endara’s

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Just Cause: Panama* (Joint History: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, 1995), 10.

¹⁰⁹ Gilboa, “The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era,” 553.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

campaign in violation of the 1977 treaties.”¹¹¹ Ambassador Arthur Davis later admitted the US government’s involvement.¹¹² As a result, Noriega felt compelled to nullify the elections since an external actor interfered with Panama’s sovereign right for fair elections free of external influences. Additionally, Noriega’s decision was highly influenced by US-Panamanian history and his personal past experience with the US. Noriega, as an astute student of history, knew how the US continually manipulated Panamanian politics through the elite oligarchy, from US assistance for Panama’s independence in 1903 to COL Remón’s US supported coup, to meet its interests at the expense of Panama’s. Moreover, personally for him, Noriega only had to go as far back as Barletta’s election in 1984 to realize that the US was more than willing to sacrifice its principles of fair democratic elections in order to see their chosen candidate in the leadership position. The US did not see things the same way. A coup now became the last chance for the US to use a Panamanian tool to achieve its policy of removing Noriega before it needed to take things into its own hands.

The Failed Coup

In October 3, 1989, Major Moisés Giroldi and members of his company captured and held General Noriega at his headquarters with the intent of removing him from power.¹¹³ Giroldi contacted US officials prior to the coup, but the US passed up the chance to step in and assist with the coup due to its believe that the coup plotters were .¹¹⁴ In addition, General Thurman felt that the coup was fatally flawed and decided not to supported. Gilboa also states: “Thurman suspected that Noriega was using Giroldi to set up a trap to undermine and destroy his credibility

¹¹¹ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

¹¹² Independent Commission of Inquiry on the U.S. Invasion of Panama, *The U.S. Invasion of Panama: The Truth Behind Operation ‘Just Cause’* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 48. Arthur Davis testimony.

¹¹³ Ironically, Major Giroldi had been instrumental in putting down a coup against General Noriega in 1988.

¹¹⁴ Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 304-305.

during his first days as SOUTHCOM Chief.”¹¹⁵ In the end, neither Thurman nor Powell, new appointees, liked the idea of supporting a coup that could fail and serve to embarrass the administration.¹¹⁶

Noriega believed that the only reason Giroldi initiated the coup was due to the enticement and support of the US. He explains “that the constant presence of the US soldiers in Panama and their undue influence upon Panamanian soldiers made them susceptible to being bribed by the US. Those officers as a result relinquished their responsibilities and turned into traitors against their country and commander.”¹¹⁷ As a result of the failed coup, Noriega cleansed the PDF of all disloyal officers. Dinges writes: “It is clear that this attempt was the last chance of using a Panamanian tool to achieve the US policy goal of removing Noriega.”¹¹⁸

The day after Major Giroldi’s coup failed, General Maxwell Thurman, Commander-in-Chief (CinC) US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), received new guidance from General Powell and started to focus his attention on the combat portion of the plans against Noriega and the PDF.¹¹⁹ General Carl Stiner, the XVIII Airborne Corps commander, as the Joint Task Force commander, was in charge of finalizing the plan and executing its operation.¹²⁰ The US military finally had the command and control structure needed to conduct a military operation that could bring a quick victory in Panama. However, the US would try one last option before it resorted to military action.

An Offer He Could Not Refuse

The US decided to make one final offer to Noriega. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs William Walker met with General Noriega at a defense forces house at Fort

¹¹⁵ Gilboa, “The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era,” 556.

¹¹⁶ Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 120, and Buckley, *Panama: The Whole Story*, 199.

¹¹⁷ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

¹¹⁸ Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 305.

¹¹⁹ General Maxwell Thurman, “Simultaneity: The Panama Case,” *ARMY* (November 1993): 16.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

Clayton where Walker made Noriega the *plomo o plata* offer.¹²¹ “General, I have a plane waiting for you right now,” said Walker, “you can pull together family members, friends, and anyone else you like, pack some things and leave. I am authorized by the president to give you \$2 million immediately, along with a medal commemorating your years of fine service.”¹²² Noriega was shocked, puzzled, and then very angry at the offer. Regardless of his feelings, Noriega realized that Walker was extremely serious about the offer and just like in the movie *The Godfather*, Walker was “making him an offer he could not refuse.”¹²³ It was money or death.¹²⁴ Noriega knew that a refusal meant death. Still, refuse is exactly what Noriega did. He declared: “There are those of us who still have honor and dignity; especially when one holds the truth.”¹²⁵ Noriega would decline the offer from the “imperialistic” United States three times.

In a fateful move on December 15, 1989, Noriega had Panama’s National Assembly pass a resolution stating, “The Republic of Panama is declared to be in a state of war while the aggression [by the United States] lasts...To confront this aggression, the job of chief of government of Panama is hereby created.”¹²⁶ In addition, Noriega believing he was living in a historic moment for which he could not accept any conditions of surrender accepted the title of “Maximum Leader for National Liberation.”¹²⁷ The action was Noriega’s attempt to mark the historical importance it held for Panama and the rest of the world in their struggle against the “colossus.”

The US failed to read the fine print of the declaration; the only part that caught its attention was “state of war.” Noriega explains, “A state of war is situation where one lives under a state of emergency prior to a local or international threat.” He continues to make clear, “The war was the making of the United States, an empire, against a weaker third world country

¹²¹ Literally, “lead or silver”—that is, the choice between being shot or taking the money.

¹²² Noriega, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 126.

¹²³ Ibid., 129.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

¹²⁶ Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 306.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

incapable of defending itself against such strength and power.”¹²⁸ Panama, for all intents and purposes, found itself under an economic, political, and moral war that was slowly strangling the Panamanian people. To Noriega, the US had already declared war on Panama and he needed to put his country on a war footing. Regardless, Noriega must have known that such a declaration would be seen in the worst light by the US. American officials referred to the resolution as “Panama’s declaration of war against the US.”¹²⁹

In the end, the declaration was either a clear calculation by Noriega to incite the US or one of the most dreadful foreign policy mistakes in recent Panamanian history. To worsen an already volatile situation, a day after the resolution was passed, US Marine 1LT Robert Paz was shot and killed near La Commandacia. Noriega and many Panamanians characterized the event as a CIA surveillance operation launched to create a situation of conflict.¹³⁰ However, the US interpreted the events as a step beyond intimidation; it was a climate of aggression the US could no longer accept.¹³¹ At this moment, President George H. Bush made the decision to force Noriega out as well using it as an opportunity to strike a crippling blow against the Panamanian Defense Forces.

The Invasion

On the evening of December 18, 1989, General Noriega found himself in Colón, Panama mediating a dockworkers’ dispute when he started receiving reports from his officers of American troop movements.¹³² The reports went further by showing that transport planes with soldiers from Fort Bragg, North Carolina were on their way as well.¹³³ However, General Noriega dismissed the reports and made nothing of them since he was used to seeing US troops conduct exercises in land, sea, and air in and around Panama for years. However, this time it was

¹²⁸ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

¹²⁹ Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 198.

¹³⁰ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

¹³¹ Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 201.

¹³² Noriega, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 4.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

different. According to Dinges, “President Bush had given the order and he had chosen the maximum option, a full-scale air and ground invasion of Panama from US bases on the mainland and in Panama itself.”¹³⁴ On December 20, 1989, the US launched an invasion with the intention of capturing Noriega and destroying the PDF.

Contrary to other accounts of the events leading up to the invasion, General Noriega claims that the invasion caught him by surprise.¹³⁵ This is hard to believe since the number of aircraft flying in the area increased beyond anything recognizable in the past and troops kept entering Panama in staggering numbers and speed. Noriega admits that he and the Panamanian Defense Forces never bothered preparing for an American invasion because the thought of it seemed preposterous at the time to him. “How could one sovereign nation just indiscriminately attack another sovereign nation without real provocation, it was just idiotic,” Noriega thought, “they would just not dare, it would be a clear violation of international law.”¹³⁶

Noriega’s defense plans were born out of weakness. Understanding that his military forces were too weak to take on the Americans, Noriega developed a defense plan that could create chaos and difficulty for US forces. Noriega did not intend Panama to react in a normal military manner. Instead, his “strategy was to oppose any extension of the present occupation force.”¹³⁷ Noriega would first have troops “establish a safe perimeter around the Panamanian military command headquarters in El Chorrillo.”¹³⁸ Second, Noriega would command from the rear in his home territory of Chiriqui. Next, “the Panama Defense Forces were to be deployed with roadblocks all around the capital in order to allow for the organization of civilian protests that would call for international media attention to the situation.”¹³⁹ The last line of defense was

¹³⁴ Dinges, *Our Man in Panama*, 307.

¹³⁵ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

¹³⁶ Noriega, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, 6.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

the use of civil defense units, the Dignity Battalions, in order to provide neighborhood protection against “the invader.”¹⁴⁰

In the end, Noriega acted too slowly while the American forces were moving at lightning speed with incredible effectiveness. Although, Noriega and his forces used minimum communications to avoid detection, US forces were able to decapitate the entire command and control structure of Noriega’s forces making coordination and the passing of orders impossible as the invasion took place. In addition, General Noriega received skewed information from a member of his own staff leading him to misinterpret American actions.¹⁴¹

Although it is impossible to ascertain who was providing Noriega with the false information, one can speculate that the misinformation Noriega received were false intelligence reports regarding the number of troops, the time of the invasion, and the locations of the assaults. Upon this realization, Noriega became less concerned with the American invasion and more pre-occupied with another coup attempt against him.¹⁴² With a possible coup threat and American forces closing in on him, Noriega decided that it was time to go on the run. Noriega compared his situation to that of Charles de Gaulle in World War II, where he was forced to flee France due to the invading Nazi army.¹⁴³ However, Noriega was not de Gaulle and would not be as fortunate. With no escape available, Noriega decided to take refuge in the Nunciature of the Vatican Embassy in Panama. After a few days, General Noriega surrendered to American forces bringing his chapter in Panama to an abrupt ending.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴² Ibid., 9.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 10.

CONCLUSION

“The United States will always be an imperial power to me.”
–General Manuel Antonio Noriega

Noriega’s Final Assessment

In the end, American military intervention succeeded in removing General Manuel Noriega from power and instituting democracy to Panama. However, General Noriega’s view of the invasion and his removal from power had a darker purpose which had nothing to do with a return to democracy but rather to ensure that Panama would remain subservient to the United States. In the interview with the author, Noriega emphasized that Panama would always be submissive not just to the elite of Panama but also the United States, who in the words of Simón Bolívar “don’t want friends, but prefer interests” due to their imperial manners and ways.¹⁴⁴ In his own words, General Noriega’s provides his final assessment of Operation JUST CAUSE and its aftermath:

The invasion of Panama in December of 1989 was nothing more than a military exercise where Panama would serve as the experimental ground for a new type of warfare supported by new weapons, a new command and control (C2) structure, and new armament.¹⁴⁵ All of the technology and procedures used during the invasion of Panama were subsequently used in future wars such as Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. High-intensity flamethrowers as well as “Fletcher” incendiary bombs created a carnage beyond recognition and the poor barrio of Chorillo met a fiery disaster due to the collateral damage caused by excessive and unnecessary firepower killing women and children indiscriminately; the damage was so intense that the bombardment of the barrio registered a seven on the Richter scale at the University of Panama. The disaster of the invasion was made worst by the apprehension of medics and doctors as well by unnecessary attacks on hospitals and other health centers. In order to hide the disaster, the

¹⁴⁴ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007.

¹⁴⁵ At the time of the invasion of Panama, the US military had developed Air Land Battle Doctrine, it was untested at the time and Noriega believes that the US used the invasion as a test bed to accredit the new doctrine.

US military impeded access of the Red Cross as well as the press.¹⁴⁶ This allowed the US military to destroy evidence of crimes committed during the invasion in the affected zones.

The Americans, with their twelve thousand soldiers stationed in Panama, did not need another twenty thousand men if their goal was really to capture me. If that were the case, they could send one hundred men or Delta Force to capture me or kill me. The reason the Americans went ahead with the invasion was Orwellian. The Americans have a law that prohibits the assassination of foreign leaders. Evidently, of course, they have a no law against invading a sovereign country and killing hundreds of men, women, and babies. No, the invasion was not intended to capture me. They wanted me dead in any case like they had Premier Maurice Bishop of Grenada dead. The invasion was intended to destroy the Panamanian Defense Forces and to guarantee that the Panama Canal would be in the friendly, Anglo-loving hands of a Panamanian puppet government by the time it was to be turned over by the United States on December 31, 1999. The invasion of Panama held the same level of infamy as the droppings of the atomic bombs and the invasion of Grenada. The invasion of Panama was a crime against the world where the sovereign right of one country was violated due only to the fact that it was weaker and unable to defend itself. The invasion was nothing more than the US exercising the worst form of colonialism and trying to reclaim what they believe was theirs...the Panama Canal.

The invasion and its effect and consequence of death have no real legacy or messages for any class of students; it could only serve to create or feed an appetite for sadism and cruelty that serves no purpose.¹⁴⁷ What legacy and significance did the droppings of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima or Nagasaki have? What message did it provide for the world? What message can the dead of the invasion of Grenada and the assassination of its leader have for the world? In the end, the Reagan and Bush administrations could not bear giving away the Panama Canal, especially to a leader who was defiant and opposed the shadow of colonialism. These leaders saw me as an obstacle because I was working on something that could unite Panama and free it from American economic dependence.¹⁴⁸

Noriega desperately wants his words to serve as a final warning to others: “What happened to Panama could easily happen to you, look at Grenada, Haiti, and Nicaragua; so

¹⁴⁶ The press was kept away from the combat zone for over three days.

¹⁴⁷ Noriega knew that the author attended the School of Advanced Military Studies and felt that the study of Operation JUST CAUSE could only be an exercise in sadism and detrimental for students.

¹⁴⁸ Manuel Noriega, interview by author, Miami, FL, November 23, 2007. The entire section of Noriega’s Final Assessment, with the exception of the opening paragraph and the last paragraph, comes from the author’s interview with General Noriega.

beware!”¹⁴⁹ Noriega reminds the reader again of Lord Palmerston’s words: “nations have no permanent friends or allies; they only have permanent interests.”¹⁵⁰ General Noriega had finally overplayed his hand and pulled the monkey’s chain once too often.

So Gilboa asks the question: “Why then, in the absence of cold war considerations, did the United States consider a relatively insignificant dictator a major challenge whose removal from power required full-scale military intervention?”¹⁵¹ A number of factors featured previously in this section answer this question: conflict escalation, the US war on drugs, and America's new responsibilities as the sole superpower.¹⁵²

Implications

Everyone responsible for planning campaigns and operations is in search of an epiphany in order to attain a deeper understanding of a situation being confronted. Systemic Operational Design (SOD) teaches the commander and planner the importance of framing a problem correctly so situations are properly assessed and weighed against a menu of possible decisions. In the case of Panama, SOD was not used. This resulted in a flawed understanding of the strategic and regional political setting. The US simply did not understand nor recognize the nuances at play in Panama. To a certain extent, the US probably did not come to study the problem as it should have since it assumed that Panama would be easily defeated and victory was assured.

Peter Eisner explains that “General Manuel Antonio Noriega’s story is important in its own right for those who seek to understand US foreign policy...many may want to dismiss Noriega’s words, but they could do well to consider something every lawyer knows: an honest man will get the facts wrong some of the time, and a liar must tell a measure of the truth; one

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ ThinkExist, <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/nations-have-no-permanent-friends-or-allies-they/771609.html> (accessed on 21 Nov 07).

¹⁵¹ Gilboa, “The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era,” 540.

¹⁵² Ibid.

must take the odds along with the measure of the man, in revisiting the historical record and the chain of events that led to the invasion of Panama.”¹⁵³

The events prior to, during, and after Operation JUST CAUSE serve as a reminder to the US and to any country that wants to impose its will and its culture on a foreign land, even if they have connections going back decades. The governments that support invasions, revolutions, and coups of any type usually act with the certainty that they will win, and they might. Their victories, however, can come back to haunt them by becoming Pyrrhic victories. The US is learning this especially in the volatile Middle East.

Gilboa summarizes the following: “Noriega’s conflict with the United States escalated from one crisis to another and each crisis ended with an actual or symbolic victory for him up until the invasion of 1989. Each victory strengthened his position inside Panama and motivated him to challenge the United States even further. Following each victory, the United States had to use tougher measures, ending with the most extreme one of military intervention. The United States continually redefined the Noriega problem, which finally became an issue larger than just Noriega and Panama.”¹⁵⁴ It is important to note that both sides operated on false assumptions. Both Noriega and the US did not understand the factors that were at play; neither side ever truly understanding the other and therefore creating a perfect breeding ground for war.

Gilboa expertly posits:

Initially, the United States cultivated a relationship with an unscrupulous leader in the name of a cause, fighting the spread of communism, ostensibly larger than his liabilities. The greater cause was helping the contras overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. But by employing Noriega, the United States compromised the long-term, more fundamental American interests of stability, security, human rights, and democracy in Panama. US officials ignored Noriega’s criminal activities and for a long period let him believe he

¹⁵³ Noriega, *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega*, xxxi.

¹⁵⁴ Gilboa, “The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era,” 559.

would be protected from prosecution and retaliation. Noriega thought that only a few State Department officials wanted him removed from power, and he considered his allies in the intelligence and the national security establishments more influential than the diplomats. It was difficult for both Noriega and his supporters to change their perceptions of each other. Noriega's supporters in Washington were slow to understand his growing threat to US interests, and Noriega failed to notice the transformation of his status from an ally to an enemy as his protectors slowly faded away.”¹⁵⁵

Ottaway stresses that “successful semi-authoritarian regimes,” as those led by Generals Torrijos and Noriega, “are not imperfect democracies...they are stable in their state and do not wish to shift toward democracy...they are purposely-ambiguous systems that are carefully constructed and maintained while competition to their power is prohibited.”¹⁵⁶ General Torrijos’ as well as Noriega’s regime was such a system. It bathed in the stream of the Bonapartist tradition handed down from Simón Bolívar. General Torrijos showed up just at the time when the people suffered from democratic type failures. These failures, in the example of Panama, allowed Torrijos to cement his power by using his ability to reach that part of society previously ignored. He and Noriega did all of this “in the name of people’s democracy, also known as socialism.”¹⁵⁷

It is important to note that democracy’s hold on Panama can only be described as figurative. Ropp argues that “the reason for this was the elite oligarchy’s inability to transform Panama into a democracy due to its inherent frailty and dependence on the US. Panama’s unique role as the crossroads of America allowed it to only develop an urban commercial elite oligarchy that attempted to monopolize political power through its major economic means to reinforce its central political role. It compensated for its weaknesses by controlling the lower class through

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 559.

¹⁵⁶ Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged*, 3.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 4.

the police power of the state itself.”¹⁵⁸ Little did the elite oligarchy realize that that same police power it relied upon to protect itself would grow into a leviathan to challenge its power and change the political landscape of Panama and leaving it with a lasting legacy of semi-authoritarian leadership. As a result, it can be argued that Panama never experienced a functioning democracy since 1903; making it more of an Ottawanian state. The elite’s ambivalent attitude and the populist awakening poor governance created forced the United States to re-examine its foreign policy toward Panama on numerous occasions. The change obviously included the use of force.

Ottaway makes a convincing argument that “in order to deepen democratic transitions, the US will have to make clearer and harder choices among conflicting goals in many countries. It will have to engage more often in high-end activities that entail greater risks but also the possibility of greater payoff, to decide when they are justified in intervening more forcefully in the deepening of transitions. The US will also have to do a better job of coordinating overall policy toward individual countries and the democracy promotion projects they fund in those countries.”¹⁵⁹

It is important to heed Ottaway’s point since the US continues to conduct operations in the same manner throughout the world. In agreement, Gilboa stresses:

The way in which the United States handled the Noriega affair was not an isolated case in how the United States has managed international crises in recent years. Several critical issues and mistakes made in this confrontation reappeared in subsequent international crises, most noticeably in the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis and war, where the US also dealt with an authoritarian ruler. Like Noriega, Iraq's Saddam Hussein did not believe the United States would use force against him. Similarly, he received mixed and confusing messages from the United States, which led him to assume that he could take aggressive actions

¹⁵⁸ Steve C. Ropp, “What Have We Learned From The Noriega Crisis,” *Latin American Research Review*, VOL 28, NO 3, (1993), 191.

¹⁵⁹ Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged*, 238.

against the Iraqi opposition and neighboring states without risking a major confrontation with the United States. Indeed, as in the Noriega case, Washington considered Saddam a valuable ally serving a larger cause, in this case the battle against Iran's effort to spread Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East.¹⁶⁰

The comparisons of Operations JUST CAUSE, DESERT STORM, and IRAQI FREEDOM show how studying conflicts through the lenses of opposition leaders proves that institutional mistakes continue to be made because a perfect template cannot be created. The complexities of the world will just not allow it. As retired Major General Robert Scales noted in a hearing of the House Armed Services Committee, "War is a thinking man's game. ... We need to be able to understand the nonmilitary advantage, to read intentions, to build trust, to convert opinions, to manage perceptions — all tasks that demand an exceptional ability to understand people, their culture, and their motivation."¹⁶¹ Complex problems, such as those that led to Operation JUST CAUSE, serve as a stark reminder that such crises are not quantifiable; many times it is a leap in the dark as we attempt to solve such challenges.

Today, Panama is a thriving democracy; ironically presently led by President Martin Torrijos, General Omar Torrijos' own son. Since the 1989 American intervention, Panama has turned away from its Ottawanian style state and serves as a model of what American democratic promotion can accomplish. As a result of such progress in a country recently removed from semi-authoritarian rule. Ottaway explains: "Disappointments with other governments should not overshadow the fact that the rise of semi-authoritarian regimes in itself demonstrates the extent of the political transformation the world must experience before it can undergo a democratic awakening that transforms the language of politics as well as the structure of their formal political

¹⁶⁰ Gilboa, "The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era," 560-561.

¹⁶¹ LTC Gregory A. Daddis, "Chasing the Austerlitz Ideal: The Evolving Quest for Decisive Battle," *Armed Forces Journal* (April 2006): 23.

systems.”¹⁶² In many cases, it is a step towards democracy, where citizens attain more and more political freedom and opportunities than their predecessors experienced.¹⁶³ The legacy of semi-authoritarianism and the weakness in democratic governance means that Panama’s future as a secure and thriving democracy is a goal towards which it is still working. For Americans, the pace of progress is never fast enough; however, like in Panama, positive change is still very possible.

¹⁶² Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged*, 253.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Timeline of Important Twentieth Century Events in Panama

1903	November 3 - Panama declares independence from Colombia
1904	October - Panamanian army is disbanded Panama's currency is tied to the US dollar
1914	August - Panama Canal completed
1929	February 13 – Omar Torrijos is born in Santiago de Veraguas
1936	Hull-Alfaro treaty ends Panama's protectorate status
1946	US Army School of the Americas established in the Canal Zone
1955	Remón-Eisenhower Treaty signed increasing the amount the US pays Panama for rights to the Canal; Omar Torrijos recruited as a spy by US Military Intelligence
1964	January - Riots erupt after a confrontation between Zonians and Panamanian students Torrijos picks Noriega as his military officer in Chiriquí
1968	October 11 - Military coup overthrows Dr. Arnulfo Arias November 13 - US officially recognizes the military junta December - Colonel Omar Torrijos appointed commander-in-chief of the National Guard
1969	March - Torrijos promotes himself to General; political parties are suspended. May - Governor Nelson Rockefeller visits Panama and is enthusiastic about the military regime and its populist leanings December - Counter-coup launched against Torrijos proves unsuccessful; Torrijos promotes himself to Brigadier General
1970	Manuel Antonio Noriega becomes Chief of Intelligence of the National Guard
1972	New Constitution replaces the 1946 version
1973	March – UN Security Council meets in Panama and Torrijos calls for renewed Canal negotiations.
1977	September 7 - Torrijos-Carter treaties signed in Washington, D.C. October 23 – National plebiscite conducted in Panama approves the new treaties
1978	March – US Senate approves the treaty by a vote of 68 to 32

1979	October 1 – Treaties officially implemented
1981	July 31 - Torrijos killed in a plane crash
1983	National Guard officially becomes an army and is renamed the Panamanian Defense Forces; Noriega becomes its commander-in chief
1989	December 19 – Operation Just Cause is launched
1990	January 1 –Panamanian citizen named as Administrator of the Panama Canal Commission for the first time in accordance with the treaties.
1999	December 31 – Control of the Panama Canal goes to Panama

Appendix B

Interview Questions and Answers: General Manuel Antonio Noriega

The interview was conducted by means of a questionnaire mailed to the interviewee. The author (interviewer) was located at Fort Leavenworth, KS., and the interviewee, General Noriega, was located at the Federal Corrections Institute (FCI) in Miami, FL. The formal date used in this monograph for interview purposes is November 23, 2007 based on the date placed on the returned questionnaire and answers by General Noriega.

Q1: From your perspective, what are the historical events that most define Panama's national identity? Why?

A1: Discovery of the South Pacific by Nunez de Balboa; the planning and invasion of Peru from the Panamanian island of Taboga by the Spanish (Pizarro/Almagro/Luque); the unity of Gran Colombia by Simon Bolivar; Panama's separation from Colombia in 1903; the Thousand Days War in Colombia between the Liberals and the Conservatives; construction of the Interoceanic Railway; French failure to construct the Panama Canal and its completion by the US; the four separate US invasions of Panama.

Q2: How significant was the Torrijos-Carter Canal Treaty of 1977 for the Panamanian people? What did this event mean to you personally?

A2: The treaty fulfilled the hope of liberation, economically, political, social, and dignity for the people of Panama. I personally served prior to, during, and after the negotiations in the trenches to achieve the agreement. I was assigned to fulfill the most important part of the treaty: provide security for the canal itself.

Q3: Who are the people that played the most critical roles in Panama's recent history? Are you one of them? If yes, why and how?

A3: 1962 General Jose Antonio Remon: assassinated in an international conspiracy where a North American was the primary suspect; 1941-1968 Dr. Arnulfo Arias: a nationalist president overthrown by the military on three separate occasions; Until 1968

General Bolivar Vallarino: commander of the National Guard; General Omar Torrijos: military chief and leader of the Panamanian people, fought for the liberty and sovereignty of Panama which helped gain the Canal

Yes, I played a critical role in Panama's history. I transformed the armed forces in order to carry the defense requirements of the Canal as directed by the 1977 treaties. The new armed forces would be capable of fighting against terrorism and narco-terrorism activities in Panama.

Q4: Until 1968, Panama was ruled exclusively by a small elite class. How did you feel about this small elite class ruling Panama for so long? In light of this, how significant was General Omar Torrijos' ascension to power for Panama?

A4: The elite oligarchy that ruled Panama until 1968 marginalized the Panamanian people in everything to include political, social, economic, and educational.. Torrijos' rise brought an end to the marginalization. Torrijos rule was a new opening for opportunity for the common citizen to acquire political power as well as the hope of a better life.

Q5: General Noriega, can you explain your rise to power in Panama? What were the personal traits, the training, and support that allowed you to reach such prominence?

A5: I, General Noriega am a professional soldier: attended the Glorious Military School of Peru where I earned a degree in military engineering. I also completed the infantry basic course, Jungle School, Counter-insurgency training, Airborne training, and Halo qualified where I have over 500 jumps. I graduated number one in my class at the School of the Americas.

When I was designated Brigadier General by President Ricardo de la Espriella in 1983 and recommended by Chief Commander General Paredes whom I officially relieved at Fuerte Amador. I achieved this post since I was the most senior, most time in service, ranking member of the military.

I reached prominence by my deep understanding and experience of leaders countries and having lived through important international situations such as the hostage rescue of two US ships along with their crews in Cuba.

Q6: As the leader of Panama, what were your plans for the future of Panama? Where did you want to take the country?

A6: The main plan I had for Panama was to achieve the guidelines set out in the 1977 Torrijos-Carter Treaties not yet achieved. I also wanted to expand the Canal with the economic assistance of Japan which would allow me to take Panama, a third-world country, and guide it in the direction of a first-world country through economic expansion which it still had not experienced.

I also wanted to re-organize the military and launch them into an evolutionary change that transformed the National Guard into a Defense Force respected around the world that could not only defend itself internally but also defend itself against external threats.

Q7: What is the proper relationship that Panama and the United States should have?

A7: The United States will always have an imperial attitude and relationship with Panama. The US will ensure that Panama will always depend upon the elite oligarchy that is in power now and for the future.

In 1800, Simon Bolivar said that "the US does not want friends, only interests."

Q8: What strategy did you use to deal with the United States?

A8: I dealt honestly with the United States. I always told them the truth as well as visualizing the future problems that could arise and sharing that information with the US.

Q9: Can you explain how the U.S. - Panama relationship deteriorated from sharing a common purpose to the point that the U.S. felt compelled to invade Panama?

A9: The deterioration began when the civil leadership of the US overstepped their influence over military and intelligence matters with Panama in favor of the economic elite who already holding the economic power also wanted the political power taken away back in 1968.

In addition, it also had to do with the Iran-Contra affair...the directions those individuals such as Bush, Elliot, Abrams, North, and Poindexter took the matter and insisted on supporting the contras against the Sandanistas. The apprehension of Panama to support this agenda put Panama at odds with the US administration.

Q10: What do you believe precipitated the attempted coup against you in March 1988 and October 1989?

A10: Three reasons: 1) The presence of the US military in Panamanian territory served as a destabilizing force for the Panamanian Defense Force, 2) The economic sanctions imposed by the US, and 3) secret payments to Panamanians willing to overthrow my government.

Q11: In order to prevent military action against you and Panama, the U.S. and neighboring country leaders made offers so you could give up power and leave Panama? Why did you turn them down? Were there conditions under which you would have accepted an offer to give up power and leave Panama?

A11: There are still men, such as myself, that still posses HONOR and DIGNITY especially when you have the truth! This is how I was able to tell the US NO on three separate occasions in spite of the money and security they offered me. The historical moment I was a part of did not have conditions for surrender.

Q12: Why were you compelled to nullify the elections of May 7, 1989 where Guillermo Endara competed against Carlos Duque?

A12: My intelligence elements indicated that the US was subverting the election process by interfering in it and therefore violating portions of the agreed upon 1977 treaties which prohibited such action in Panama. Ambassador Arthur Davis himself admitted to the US misconduct during the elections.

Q13: On December 15, 1989, the Panamanian National Assembly declared you ‘Maximum Leader’, the same title that General Omar Torrijos held from 1972 to 1978. What was the significance of this title to you, the Panamanian people, and the world?

A13: The importance was historical, in its moment, place, and circumstances which can only be accurately assessed within the proper context, time, and space.

Q14: In December of 1989, the National Assembly passed a declaration stating that Panama was “in a state of war so long as the U.S. continues its policy of aggression.” What was the intent of this declaration?

A14: *A “State of War” declaration is a situation one experiences during an emergency before a local or international threat. It is a term clearly understood in a military, political, or social setting.*

The war was not declared by Panama but instead by the US, the imperial power, against a weak third-world nation. What does one do before war is declared against you? By all intents and purposes, the US was conducting war activities against Panama in many fronts: material,

economic, political, and moral. It was pure economic strangulation against the Panamanian people.

Q15: Were you caught by surprise as the U.S. conducted its invasion or were you expecting it? If not surprised, how did you prepare yourself and the Panamanian Defense Forces against the invasion? What was your Command and Control plan during the U.S. Invasion?

A15: The US always had the potential to invade any country. This was proven by their invasions of Mexico, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Panama itself six times before Grenada was invaded. Based on this, what could be so surprising by their decision to invade Panama once again?

Q16: What role did control of the Panama Canal play in the decision by the United States to invade Panama?

A16: The most prominent of a role. The US wanted to maintain control of the canal for military and economic reasons.

Q17: How did you come to the decision that it was in your and Panama's best interest to finally turn yourself over to the Americans?

A17: Answer provided in memoirs.

Q18: President George H. Bush told the American public that the U.S. invaded Panama "to safeguard the lives of Americans, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking, and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaties." What is your position on this statement?

A18: I never agreed with this declaration by President Bush nor did I agree with President Reagan's assessment of my leadership. Bush was just following Reagan's policies against me and Panama.

Q19: According to your understanding of international law, was the invasion of Panama by the United States legal or illegal?

A19: Of course that it was an illegal act against every principle of international law!

However, this is normal operations for the United States' international policy.

Q20: The Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989, effectively ending the Cold War and providing the United States with a strong sense of vindication for its policy of defending democracy. With this in mind, did the end of the Cold War serve as a catalyst for the U.S. to finally decide to invade Panama?

Q21: What do you believe is the lasting historical significance of the American invasion of Panama?

Q22: What is your legacy? Is it different from what you intended?

Q23: General Noriega, is there anything else reference the events surrounding the American invasion of Panama that you believe is critical for the world to know and understand?

Answer to 20-23:

The invasion of Panama in December of 1989 was nothing more than a military exercise where Panama would serve as the experimental ground for a new type of warfare supported by new weapons, a new command and control (C2) structure, and new armament. All of the technology and procedures used during the invasion of Panama were subsequently used in future wars such as Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. High-intensity flamethrowers as well as "fletcher" incendiary bombs created a carnage beyond recognition and the poor barrio of Chorillo met a fiery disaster due to the collateral damage caused by excessive and unnecessary firepower killing women and children indiscriminately; the damage was so intense that the bombardment of the barrio registered a seven on the Richter scale at the University of Panama.

The disaster of the invasion was made worst by the apprehension of medics and doctors as well by unnecessary attacks on hospitals and other health centers. In order to hide the disaster, the US military impeded access of the Red Cross as well as the press. According to Noriega, this allowed the US military to destroy evidence of crimes committed during the invasion in the affected zones.

The Americans, with their twelve thousand soldiers stationed in Panama, did not need another twenty thousand men if their goal was really to capture me. If that were the case, they could send one hundred men or Delta Force to capture me or kill me. The reason the Americans went ahead with the invasion was Orwellian. The Americans have a law that prohibits the assassination of foreign leaders. Evidently, of course, they have a no law against invading a sovereign country and killing hundreds of men, women, and babies. No, the invasion was not intended to capture me. They wanted me dead in any case like they had Premier Maurice Bishop of Grenada dead.

The invasion was intended to destroy the Panamanian Defense Forces and to guarantee that the Panama Canal would be in the friendly, Anglo-loving hands of a Panamanian puppet government by the time it was to be turned over by the United States on December 31, 1999. The invasion of Panama held the same level of infamy as the droppings of the atomic bombs and the invasion of Grenada. The invasion of Panama was a crime against the world where the sovereign right of one country was violated due

only to the fact that it was weaker and unable to defend itself. The invasion was nothing more than the US exercising the worst form of colonialism and trying to reclaim what they believe was theirs...the Panama Canal.

The invasion and its effect and consequence of death have no real legacy or messages for any class of students; it could only serve to create or feed an appetite for sadism and cruelty that serves no purpose. What legacy and significance did the droppings of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima or Nagasaki have? What message did it provide for the world? What message can the dead of the invasion of Grenada and the assassination of its leader have for the world? In the end, the Reagan and Bush administrations could not bear giving away the Panama Canal, especially to a leader who was defiant and opposed the shadow of colonialism. These leaders saw me as an obstacle because I was working on something that could unite Panama and free it from American economic dependence.

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