

# MEXICANS CONDEMN THE U.S. INVASION

Public opinion in Mexico energetically condemned the U.S. invasion of Panama, both for the enormous human and material costs and for its violation of the political and territorial sovereignty of the Central American country. This attitude was shared by all political parties in the Mexican Congress, by well known personalities and by social organizations which formed groups of solidarity with the people of Panama, and by the nation's diplomatic authorities. Here, *Voices* presents separate interviews by our reporter Jackie Buswell with María Emilia Farías, adjunct secretary to the Presidency of the National Executive Committee of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico City; Jesús Conzález Schmal, spokesman on international affairs of the National Action Party (PAN); and Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, of the Institute for U.S. Studies and Research, of the UNAM.

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**What is your opinion, or that of your party, on the U.S. invasion of Panama?**

*Jésus González Schmal:*

The PAN has strongly disapproved and condemned this arbitrary action perpetrated last December 20 against the Panama Republic. It is an act which violates principles of international law and Article 2 of the United Nations Charter, which forbids the invasion of foreign territories even in supposed attempts to resolve conflicts. The PAN's attitude to the invasion is one of absolute censure.

*Adolfo Aguilar:*

I think an invasion is the worst conceivable act of violation of any principle of co-existence among states. There is no possible justification for invading Panama. Beyond that, with the invasion, the U.S. establishes with absolute clarity that the thrust of its policy is to maintain its hegemonic control over the region despite changes in the international environment, despite the transformation of relations between the Soviet Union and its area of influence. The United States establishes in the midst of all these changes, that it is not ready to accept any new conditions which will limit its freedom of action in its so-called backyard.

*María Emilia Farías:*

Our party has condemned the use of force and the violation of national sovereignty of a free country, we are totally opposed to this kind of actions. The unjustified aggression against a country of some two million inhabitants caused



María Emilia Farías. Photo by Alejandra Novoa

thousands of dead and wounded, with indiscriminate bombing against the civil population. In short, the invasion violated the political independence, the sovereignty, the territorial integrity and the self-determination of Panama. We were stunned by the cynicism and puerility of the pretexts given to justify the invasion, and by the way the invaders proceeded to destroy Panama's armed forces for the "crime" of maintaining nationalist sentiments, so as to then impose a government prepared to act according to U.S. plans for its neo-colonial domination of Panama.

**Do you think the fight against drug trafficking, or the desire to arrest General Noriega, could possibly justify the invasion?**

*Jesús González Schmal:*

The reasons given by President George Bush when he tried to justify the invasion to the world, were frankly childish. He first said that U.S. troops had disembarked in Panama to protect the life of U.S. citizens resident there; then he spoke about the troops defending or restoring democracy in Panama, and thirdly he said the troops were going to arrest an international drug trafficker. None of these reasons can be considered valid justification for a military invasion, much less so, when it is well known that the U.S. has an army of 12,000 men stationed in Panama. Nor can it be justified when we consider the differences between General Noriega and the U.S. government, which in many aspects are personal differences between Noriega and President Bush, dating from the time when Noriega worked for U.S. intelligence services, when these were directed by George Bush. Later, the U.S. State Department

said the invasion was a defensive attitude of legitimate defense because General Noriega had declared a state of war, and the U.S. felt this was an aggression against them, to which they had to respond - this is another flagrant contradiction, because, if they did not concede Noriega representativity of the Panamanian state, how come they gave him credit and capacity to declare war in the name of the state of Panama? Thus, none of the reasons given, resist analysis. From the point of view of international law, they are frankly inadmissible, and George Bush is either ignorant of these international principles, or he is very basic in his reasoning.

*Adolfo Aguilar:*

There is no reason which could justify the invasion. The reasons given by President Bush are so weak, and at the same time, so cynical, because they include the assumption that the U.S. has the right to determine when an individual has violated international or domestic laws without respect for international procedures and principles. Just to go into the country and capture him, or attempt to capture him and bring him to the jurisdiction of the United States - this is an imperial act, no more and no less, and there is no justification in the 20th century for imperial acts.

*María Emilia Farías:*

No, not at all. We are very concerned to see that now the fight against drug trafficking is given a political content, and is used as a pretext by the United States to invade countries. We fear that now that the U.S. government sees drugs as the main danger for its citizens (replacing communism as the major danger), that country will now assume the right to invade nations and carry out other aggressive actions which violate international treaties. We agree that drugs do indeed constitute a problem for the health of many Americans, but now this is the new pretext used to justify U.S. interventions in Latin America.

**Do you think the real reason for the invasion was that of capturing Noriega, or is related to the issue of the Panama Canal?**

*Jesús González Schmal:*

I think the issue of the Canal is still relatively remote - ten years away. If the U.S. really wanted to destabilize Panama so as to prolong its administration of the Canal, it would act closer to the year 2000. Rather, I believe President Bush has a grand aversion and animosity towards Manuel Antonio Noriega. I cannot explain a movement of 25,000 soldiers of the world's most powerful army in the search of a drug trafficker and delinquent. It seems to me that there is something else at the bottom of all this - or there is great animosity between these two characters, or there is an interest of the U.S. state to arrest Noriega - without him talking - for some reason related to information that Noriega could make public. I cannot understand how, if the U.S. had wanted to act according to international law, they could not have resorted to less aggressive measures. I think that to go and bomb such a small country, to kill civil victims - when they could easily have sent two or three experts to capture Noriega - are methods that violate not only the peace of that nation, but they are also against good common sense and reasoning.

*Adolfo Aguilar:*

The purpose of the invasion was to establish the conditions of the relationship of the U.S. with the region of Central America, and with Panama in particular, based on the right of the U.S. to intervene. The objective was to bring back the notion that the U.S. has the right to intervene. This is the Monroe Doctrine. I think that the issue of the Canal is a substantial reason, but it falls within this overall objective, which is to reestablish the notion that the U.S., whether for the Canal, or for the drug issue, or of any other "valid reason" according to U.S. judgements, has the right to invade, to intervene, in Latin America. This is the political purpose of this invasion, to make it clear to all of Latin America and to the international community in general, that the U.S. retains the right to intervene and to invade.

*María Emilia Farías:*

During the invasion, more importance was given to the arrest of General Noriega, as a drug trafficker and delinquent, and the issue of the Canal was apparently pushed aside. However, according to the Carter-Torrijos agreements signed in 1977, a new Administrator of the Canal had to be appointed precisely in January 1990. I don't believe the invasion and the problem of the Canal are two separate issues, rather, one is the mask which is hiding something else - and that is, the control of the Canal, and the problem of U.S. bases in Panama, which is a strategic problem, both from the point of view of trade and of defense and security. At present, U.S. troops are well installed, and the new Administrator has been named by the government of Endara. If this Administrator had been named by nationalist Panamanians, he would surely have worked for the fulfillment of the Torrijos-Carter Treaties on the Canal. Now, with an Administrator named by Endara, who has been imposed by the United States, the fulfillment of the Treaties is going to be more difficult. I imagine that this new Administrator - who is a Panamanian - must be someone more inclined to protect U.S. interests, rather than those of Panama.

What is very serious now is that the invasion inaugurates a new kind of foreign policy for the United States, and we hope that it is an isolated case, and that this kind of invasion will not be the *modus operandi* of the U.S. in the future.

**Why do you say that it is an isolated case, when there exists a long history of U.S. invasions of the area?**

*María Emilia Farías:*

Yes, there is a long list of earlier invasions, but now that we suppose that the world is entering a new stage of co-existence and dialogue, and strong ideological frontiers are collapsing without the spilling of blood, I would like to see the case of Panama as an isolated one, and that the U.S. will soon withdraw its troops, and that these military interventions will not be their *modus operandi* in the future, especially in the light of recent events in Eastern Europe.

**What is your opinion on the hostilities exercised against various Embassies in Panama during the invasion?**

*Jesús González Schmal:*

There are no words to describe it. I don't think that, even in the worst states of war, have there been such significant violations of international law. I think these hostilities constituted an aggression against the entire world.

*Adolfo Aguilar:*

These were an obvious consequence of the same notion: the right to intervene means that the U.S. assumes the moral, political or strategic reason that goes beyond the specific status of diplomatic immunity or sovereignty of states. The notion with which the U.S. is acting in Latin America is that it retains the possibility of determining when an international law is applicable and when it is not. I think the offenses to diplomatic immunity were not an excess committed in midst of an invasion, as Americans will probably try to justify it; it was not an excess, it was the essence of the invasion. The message of the invasion was that there is no diplomatic immunity or national jurisdiction that can be argued against the U.S.' right to invade. I think this highlights the fact that the U.S. is going back to the early notions of the Monroe Doctrine - for a number of reasons in the U.S. domestic environment, and in the international arena. The U.S. is recovering the notion that it is back on its feet, that there is nothing standing in the way of the U.S. exercising its role in the world, that there is no sense of impotence in the face of outside events, no sense of moral doubt after the American society has gone through the traumas of the Vietnam war, Watergate, the Iran-contra scandal. The U.S. emerges from all of this with the deep conviction that it is the duty of the nation, its moral obligation, to exercise the role of policeman of the world. This makes Americans feel good - even if the rest of the world feels threatened, Americans feel good: this is clear from how the invasion was covered in the U.S. press, and the reac-

tion of the American public. The invasion made them feel like Rambo, this is very much a part of their culture.

Another element here, is that the U.S. reads the events in Eastern Europe as a permission to behave the American way: Americans feel that *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the opening of socialist regimes and the fall of the single party system, represent a defeat of socialism and a triumph of capitalism, a defeat of the empire of the USSR and a triumph for the U.S. empire.

*María Emilia Farías:*

We are totally opposed to these violations of the Viena Convention, which gives foreign Embassies the right to immunity.  
And following these aggressions, the U.S. has given no apology, no explanation.

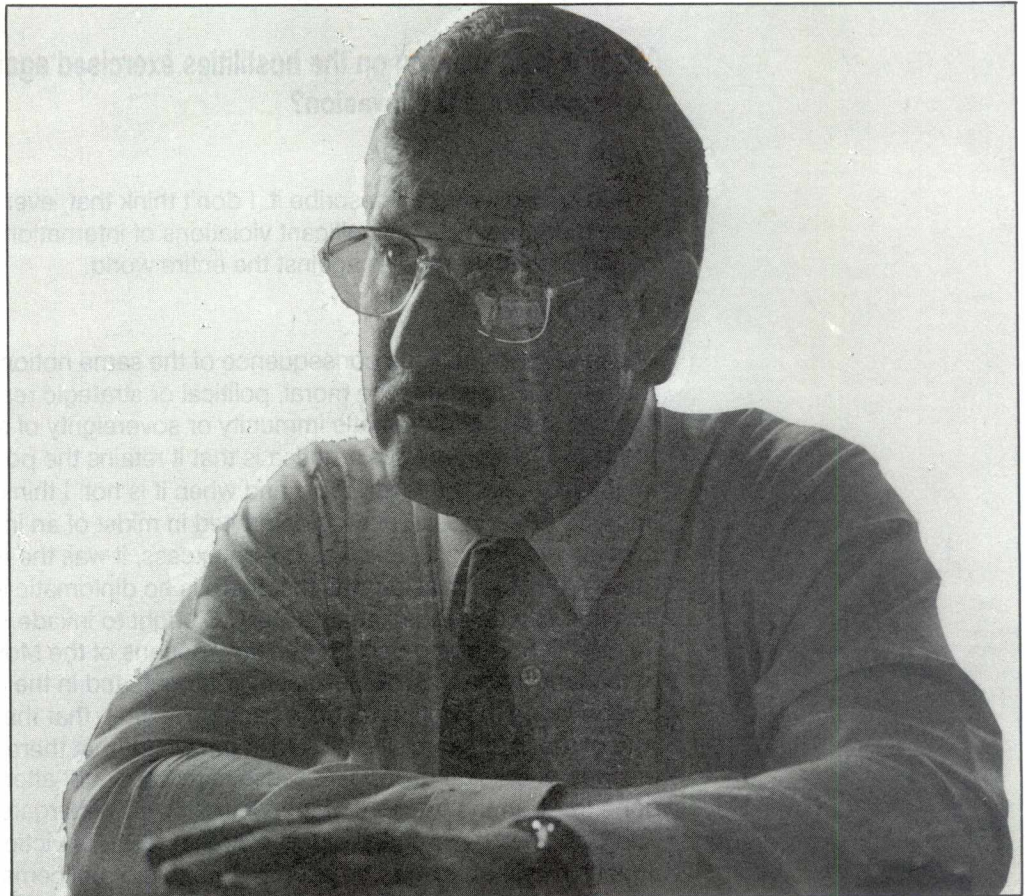
**What are your considerations on the Latin American reaction to the invasion?**

*Jesús González Schmal:*

I think the Mexican government gave a very weak response to the invasion, I would classify the response as one of mere declarations - which makes us suspect that the Mexican government was in some way linked to Noriega's group, and this reduced its moral authority to condemn the U.S. occupation.

Eight leaders of the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) of Panama have received the right to exile in Mexico, yet this was the party which unduly and arbitrarily gave Noriega the character of head of state in that country. It was also the party which supported Mexico's governing party, the PRI, in Buenos Aires, when the PRI was elected to the presidency of the Confederation of Latin American Political Parties (COPPAL) in early December last year.

As for the rest of Latin America, only El Salvador, for obvious reasons, supported the U.S. All the other countries of the region, in one way or another, condemned the in-



Jesús González Schmal. Photo by Alejandra Novoa

vasion. It was a great opportunity to reactivate and give power to the Organization of American States (OAS), which could have worked to prevent the invasion when it was evident that it was being planned.

If the OAS had called an urgent meeting in early December, it could have played a very important role, and perhaps avoided the spilling of blood and the violent transgression of international law.

*Adolfo Aguilar:*

It would be fair to say that the Latin American governments were over-cautious, they were intimidated by the action. They fell into the trap of the invasion even before it took place. When the U.S. proposed a discussion on the Panama question in the Organization of American States (OAS) before the invasion, Latin Americans tried to conciliate positions. This conciliatory position involved opposing intervention on the one hand but on the other, justifying morally and politically the U.S. claim against Noriega. By assuming basically the same judgement as the U.S. about Noriega, Latin Americans opened the door for the invasion. Latin Americans in the OAS made the terrible mistake of assuming that the U.S. would act more in accordance with international law.

If there was something which contributed to the U.S. making up its mind to invade, it was the undecisive role played by Latin American governments in the OAS: they defended principles, but they left the door open for the invasion. After the fact, there was a very strong reaction from Latin Americans against the invasion, but there were no strong actions to make the United States pay the price for the gross violations to international law. I think every government in Latin America had the moral, political and historical obligation to put a price on the invasion, at the level of bilateral relations. Ambassadors should have been recalled, and countries should have, individually and collectively, declared that they needed to make a thorough revision of their bilateral relations with the United States. Latin American governments should have made it clear that the invasion was inadmissible behavior, and they did not do this, they condemned the invasion but they took no actions to make clear that the aggression was inadmissible.

What happens, is that Latin American governments want to have good bilateral relations with the U.S., and at the same time make anti-invasion speeches, and as the Americans say, you can't have the cake and eat it too. The OAS should never have accepted that its duty was to help the U.S. get rid of Noriega, and almost explicitly the OAS assumed that role.

*María Emilia Farías:*

I think the reaction generally was weak and dispersed. We Latin Americans should have joined forces more and protested with greater energy - but each country in the region has its own very serious problems which I think impeded the creation of a solid united front on the issue of Panama. Some people consider that certain countries of the region permitted - or if they did not permit, they facilitated - the invasion because of their attitudes beforehand, as for example in the case of the expulsion of Panama from the Contadora Group.

As for Mexico, I think it was very correct in its reaction, drawing a line with the U.S., saying that we can be neighbors and collaborators, but drawing a line nonetheless. One very clear indication of the Salinas government was when it made clear that vice-President Dan Quayle was not welcome. We don't want any kind of explanations from Mr. Quayle, we don't need his presence here.

On the other hand, the attitude of Costa Rica seems very strange to me, I can't understand how President Oscar Arias, who won the Nobel Peace Prize, could have received Endara with full state honors.

**There were two votations in the U.N. following the invasion. One condemned the invasion, and in this first voting, the U.S. received support from some 20 nations. The second voting was on a condemnation of the hostilities to the Embassies, and here, the United States was left by itself. What do you think is the reason for this change in international opinion?**

*Jesús González Schmal:*

For me, it is important to point out the shameful attitude of France, which supported and justified the invasion, and compare it with the reaction of Spain, which in contrast, strongly condemned the invasion from just a few hours after it began.

As for the rest of the world, I think that as more information became available, and people realized there was no real resistance, nor risk of closing the Canal, they also realized the invasion was an excessive act, that could not be explained in logical terms, but which makes many of us think of reasons of personal animosity or of reasons of state information, or simply as an act which no-one can understand — that's why international opinion began to change, and later the European Economic Community also condemned the invasion. We hope the general public in the United States will be influenced by this, because now that there is no counter-weight of military force from the U.S.S.R., the world has to rely more and more on the capacities of democratic dynamics within the U.S., so there are self restraints to military adventures. Up to the moment, according to results of surveys, these self restraints don't appear to exist, but I think that as the U.S. public becomes better informed, and U.S. Congress members understand the damage done to the U.S. image and to the international co-existence, they are going to realize the invasion was a mistake. I believe that the concepts of human rights are more recognized, more assimilated today, and this will eventually have to modify attitudes of the U.S. government, its "Manifest Destiny" and its tendency to want to dominate the world, to act as policeman in the international arena.

*Adolfo Aguilar:*

Those countries which voted with the United States in the first vote, are those which want to see the U.S. play its police role in the world, while the second vote reflects greater concern among nations, including those which first supported the U.S., for the cost of this type of behavior. The international community realized that by giving the U.S. permission to invade, they were also allowing the U.S. to violate principles of international law when it suits its objectives.

Meanwhile, except for El Salvador, Honduras, and for a luke-warm reaction on the part of Costa Rica, all Latin American governments consistently opposed the invasion. And the general public here judged it as unacceptable, because the invasion is based on the assumption that we are incapable of governing ourselves, that we are intrinsically corrupted, that we need to be guided and guarded and this is an unacceptable notion.

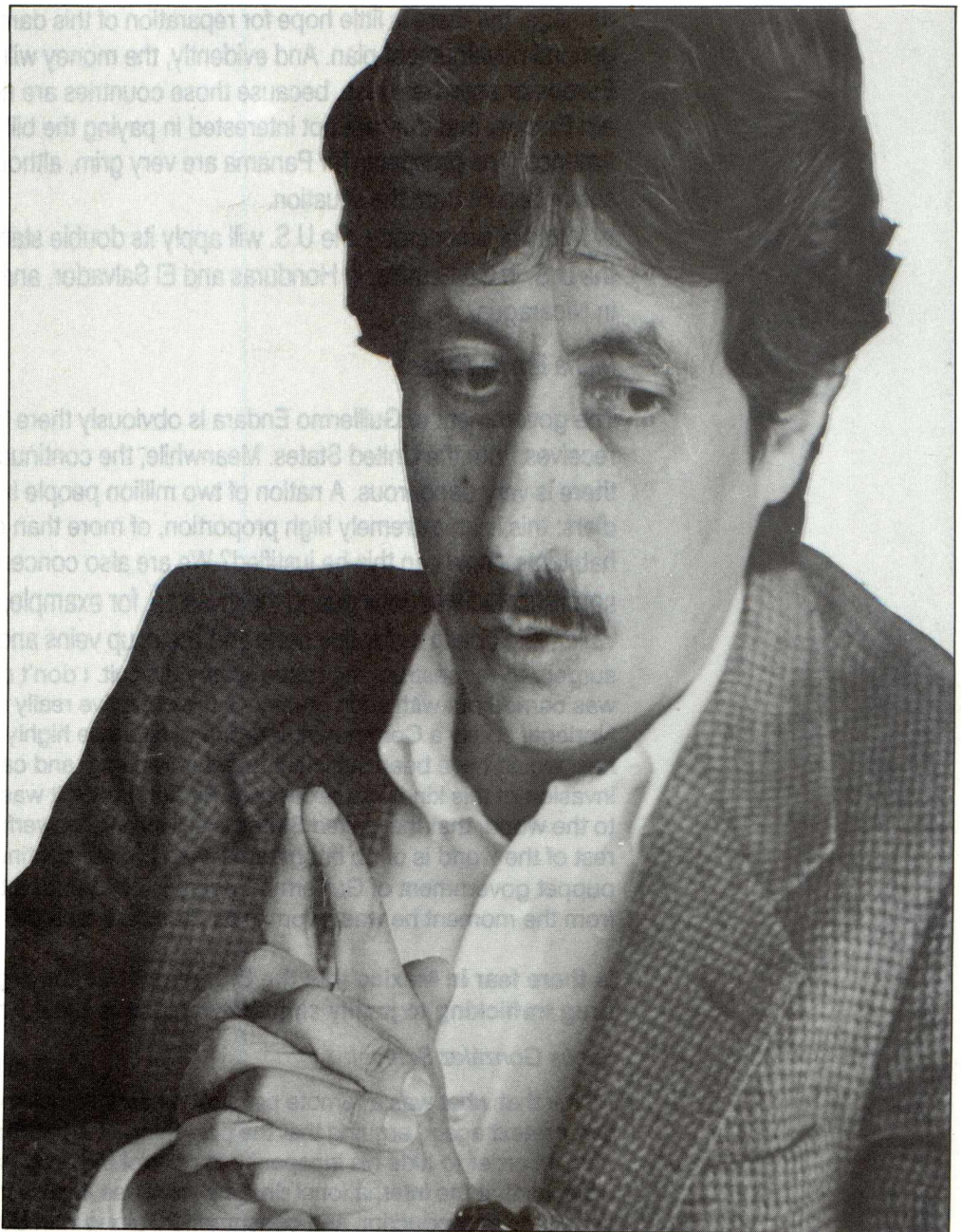
### **What prospects do you see for the future of Panama?**

*Jesús González Schmal:*

The invasion was one of the greatest diplomatic errors ever committed by the U.S., and in itself forms an obstacle for the restoration of constitutional order. When they made Guillermo Endara assume office as President of Panama in a U.S. military base, surrounded by occupation forces, they were making him illegitimate, and therefore he is a man who temporarily can have some support in his country, due to the desperation of the people there, and to their desire to end the anxiety of an occupation. But it is evident that he has lost moral prestige in the eyes of other countries, which he is not going to recuperate. This damage to his prestige can also be directly attributed to the United States. Endara is surely going to be a docile President, an unconditional of the U.S. The events which brought him to power indicate an ominous destiny for the future of Panama.

*Adolfo Aguilar:*

I think the government of Guillermo Endara is going to prove that the U.S. is capable of imposing a government but that it is absolutely incapable of establishing a framework for democracy. The government of Endara has been inspired by passion, revenge and abuse, just as Noriega was accused of, and the U.S. press has accepted violations of human rights during and since the invasion, that were absolutely unac-



Adolfo Aguilar Zinser. Photo by Alejandra Novoa

ceptable for the American press when they were committed by Noriega. Panama is governed today by the American double standard democracy. One thing we have to take into account here is that Noriega was a terrible leader of Panamanian nationalists, a disastrous leader of the poor in their struggle for justice, that he did a great harm to his country and to Latin America, that he propitiated a situation which gave the U.S. the opportunity to regain a position in Latin America which many people have fought for the U.S. to lose. So Noriega cannot be listed as a hero or as a nationalist, he has to be listed as an enemy of nationalism, as an enemy of the principle of non-intervention.

Thus, the Panamanians who were trapped in the situation created by Noriega and the U.S., today are victims - they are probably those who looted in the streets of Panama in an act of chaotic desperation; they knew they could not defend their country, and so they tried to grab what they could.

The Endara government will be over-confident in expecting money that will never arrive from the U.S., which will give token money to Endara, because Endara doesn't deserve more than that. Now that its problem is resolved, the U.S. will not put any more money into Panama, it has other commitments and interests, and it already has Panama in its pocket, and the U.S. doesn't need to spend another penny to keep it that way. It is a disastrous moment for Panama, which has suffered severe economic



damage, but there is little hope for reparation of this damage, and much less, for a general development plan. And evidently, the money will not come from Western Europe or anywhere else, because those countries are now more interested in Eastern Europe, and they are not interested in paying the bill for U.S. actions in Central America. The prospects for Panama are very grim, although some businessmen will surely benefit from the situation.

In terms of democracy, the U.S. will apply its double standard, which is imposed by the U.S. in Guatemala, in Honduras and El Salvador, and which it will try and impose in Nicaragua.

*María Emilia Farías:*

The government of Guillermo Endara is obviously there to carry out the orders it receives from the United States. Meanwhile, the continued presence of U.S. troops there is very dangerous. A nation of two million people invaded by nearly 30,000 soldiers: this is an extremely high proportion, of more than one soldier per 100 inhabitants - how can this be justified? We are also concerned about the use of sophisticated weapons during the invasion, for example, fragmentary grenades, which explode in many tiny parts and break up veins and tissues in such a way that surgery to reconstruct the tissue is very difficult. I don't understand why the invasion was carried out with such cruelty - if the objective really was the capture of General Noriega, surely a Commando group of all those highly trained troops that the U.S. has, would have been sufficient to enter Panama and capture him, I don't see that an invasion of this kind was necessary. Rather, I think it was a warning to the region, or to the world, that the United States is still strong, powerful, that what happens to the rest of the world is of no importance, the U.S. will continue to do what it likes. And the puppet government of Guillermo Endara is condemned to do what the U.S. orders, from the moment he was sworn in as President on a U.S. military base.

**Is there fear in Mexico that the U.S. might use the argument of the fight against drug trafficking to justify similar invasions in Latin America?**

*Jesús González Schmal:*

I think that what was a remote possibility, has materialized. I feel that Bush will recur to this pretext again, arguing that the poisoning of Americans by drugs comes from outside, in order to hide his incapacity to control the drug problem within his country. It is obvious that the international drug network has its axis in the United States, and that problems of production and consumption, along with other associated businesses, cannot be separated. In saying this, I do not, by any means, want to exclude the Mexican government of responsibility for having permitted, and in many cases associated with drug traffickers, but I think that President Bush is acting for his electorate so as to justify his incapacity to do something inside his country. ■