

8-4-2005

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## Recommended Citation

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## **Cuba Does Not Have Roger Noriega To Kick Around Any Moret**

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Cuba

Published: 2005-08-04

Cuba's long-time archnemesis Roger Noriega announced his resignation as US assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, the last in a series of government platforms from which he has been taking pot shots at Cuban President Fidel Castro for the last 20 years.

Early reaction from the island was lighthearted as National Assembly president Ricardo Alarcon told reporters, "I'm going to miss him a lot if he doesn't appear before the cameras talking, saying dumb things. He's really a very funny person." But the joking quickly gave way to bitter invective as official Cuba learned who, or more to the point what, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice intends to replace Noriega with.

On July 28, the Bush administration named Caleb McCarry to the position of Cuba transition coordinator, a position created last year on the theory that the US could determine the nature of a post-Castro government. Rice, announcing the appointment, said the White House policy was to "accelerate the demise of Castro's tyranny." She said McCarry, a little-known Republican Party activist and staff member of the House International Relations Committee for the past eight years, would "direct our government's actions in support of a free Cuba." McCarry said, "Viva Cuba libre."

### *Criticism of policy from all sides*

This time, Alarcon was not amused. "This is proof that they are really following the plan. [McCarry] will coordinate everything the United States does to overthrow the revolution," he said. An editorial in Granma, the Cuban Communist Party newspaper, said that, with this appointment, Bush "once again meddles in a rude manner in the internal affairs of Cuba by naming one of his men to publicly coordinate subversive actions against the island." Harsh criticism of the appointment was not limited to pro-Castro sources.

Elizardo Sanchez, famed as a controversial Cuban dissident (see NotiCen, 2003-09-25), said the move was a mistake. "It's counterproductive. This will deepen tensions between Washington and Havana and allow Cuba's totalitarian government to raise the specter of foreign intervention in Cuban affairs," said Sanchez. Manuel Cuesta Morua, spokesperson for Arco Progresista, a coalition of dissident groups in Cuba, said, "This is a disastrous policy for Cuba and the opposition. They're really not doing us any favors." He told an Inter Press Service reporter that the Bush administration is guided primarily by its own geopolitical interests in its relations with Cuba and that its policies make it more difficult for the opposition to reach out to the Cuban public.

In Washington, Wayne Smith, who headed the US Interests Section in Havana from 1979 to 1982, said Cubans are not interested in a US-led transition. In an article in the Spanish magazine

Contrapunto, Smith said it would be difficult to imagine a more mistaken and harmful policy than Bush's, which he considers a "perfect failure." Noriega has been involved in Washington's Cuba transition movement since its beginning.

In January 2004, speaking of the goals of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, which Bush announced in October of the previous year, Noriega said the aims of the commission were: "1 establishing democracy and the rule of law; 2 creating the core institutions of free enterprise; 3 modernizing infrastructure; and 4 providing health, housing, and human services. Cooperating with international organizations and keeping the multilateral community focused on Castro's continued human rights abuses will also be part of our efforts." Noriega gave this broad outline a month after then secretary of state Colin Powell convened the first meeting of the commission at which the transition-coordinator post was created.

The commission's core group was drawn, according to Noriega, from "State, USAID, HUD, Commerce, Treasury, Homeland Security, and the National Security Council." Rice now chairs the commission. In her remarks on the appointment, Rice said the transition strategy would be implemented with a US\$59 million budget. She said that, as a part of "empowering Cuban civil society to better organize and advocate for democratic change...we are working to deny resources to the Castro regime to break its blockade on information and to broadcast the truth about its deplorable treatment of the Cuban people." This was in apparent reference to the US use of its military aircraft to broadcast programming on the same frequency used by Cuba's Channel 13.

The BBC Monitoring Media reported that it picked up a broadcast on Cuba's Radio Rebelde in which Arnaldo Coro, co-founder of Radio Havana, alleged the use of the airplane, a C-130J equipped with military-grade communications gear, to broadcast Tele Marti is a violation of international broadcasting regulations governed by the UN. Coro said the US has been repeatedly notified of the violation. Rice mentioned Noriega in her remarks only to thank him for his "tireless efforts." She did not name his replacement and has not done so to date, but the media have reported that Thomas Shannon, head of Latin American affairs at the National Security Council, would be the new undersecretary. Shannon was deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs from June 2002 to March 2003.

## *Noriega in a nutshell*

Roger Noriega has been assistant secretary since 2003, when he took over from Otto Reich. He was US permanent representative to the Organization of American States (OAS) from 2001 to 2003. From 1997 to 2001 he served as senior staff member for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations chaired by then Sen. Jesse Helms. In the late 1980s he worked for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), managing "nonlethal" aid in Central America. Much of this aid went clandestinely to supply the Nicaraguan contras during the war in that country.

Noriega also played a key role in the fall of Haiti's ex-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (1991, 1994-1996, 2001-2004) in February 2004 (see NotiCen, 2004-03-04). After US operatives removed Aristide from Haiti, Noriega told a congressional hearing, "Now we can make a new beginning in

helping Haiti to build a democracy that respects the rule of law and protects the human rights of its citizens." That done, Noriega then turned to the ouster of Fidel Castro.

He encouraged the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba in designing new measures to tighten the embargo against Cuba and the current US\$59 million program to, he said, "bring an end to the regime of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro and to prepare to assist a post-Castro Cuba." It has been widely suggested that Noriega's departure was not entirely voluntary despite his saying, "I've been in government for over 20 years and this seemed like a good time to make a change." The naming of McCarry the day before his resignation took away from him his most fervent issue.

Unnamed senior State Department officials have told the media that they have been upset by his attacks on Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez while they have been trying to reduce tensions with that country in the wake of Secretary Rice's failure to enlist other Latin American governments in a campaign to isolate Chavez on her recent trip to South America (see NotiSur, 2005-05-13). Noriega is expected to remain in office until September.

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