U.S. Ambassador To Venezuela Accused Of Converting Embassy Into Center For Anti-panama Campaign In Latin America

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According to the April 16 issue of pro-government newspaper La Republica, US ambassador to Venezuela, Otto Juan Reich, has converted the embassy in Caracas into "the center of support for the Civic Crusade" in Latin America. Reich, said La Republica, acts as a promoter of the Crusade's campaign to isolate Panama from governments in the region. La Republica stated that in 1986, Reich was described as persona non grata by then-political leader Carlos Andres Perez. Today, said the newspaper, "economic blackmail" has persuaded President Perez to tolerate Reich, and publicly criticize the Panamanian political process. The newspaper described Reich as a Cuban-American committed to military solutions to conflicts in Central America. Reich served as director of the Open Diplomacy Office (Oficina de la Diplomacia Abierta) in Venezuela. The US Congress, said the report, found this office to be linked with the Iran-contra scandal. La Republica asserted that with US support, Civic Crusade militants travel constantly to Venezuela to carry out propaganda activities. The newspaper said it had established that negative reactions to US policy on Panama resulted in the decision to move the planning center for the Civic Crusade's campaign against the government outside the country. (Basic data from Notimex, 04/16/89)

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