

NEWS from

U.S. Senator Bob Dole

(R.-Kans.)

New Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 224-6521

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, 1978

CONTACT: JANET ANDERSON
BOB DOWNEN

DOLE TALKS WITH PANAMANIAN LEADER ABOUT TREATIES, DRUGS, AND CUBA

Washington, D.C. — Senator Bob Dole today released a memorandum based on staff notes, of his conversation last Friday, December 30, with General Omar Torrijos in Panama City. Both Senator Dole and Senator Paul Laxalt (R-Nevada) met for more than one hour with the Panamanian leader, and had a frank and wide-ranging exchange of views. Senators and General Torrijos discussed the pending Panama Canal Treaties, international drug trafficking, and the influence of Fidel Castro on Panamanian politics.

Following are excerpts from the conversation:

Senator Dole: We have read in our newspapers that you challenge the United States to send in Marines to protect the Canal if the pending treaties aren't ratified. We don't feel that inflammatory statements are helpful to the situation.

General Torrijos: That was not an inflammatory statement. We are warning the United States of a danger if the Treaties aren't ratified. The press has sometimes portrayed me as a white Idi Amin, but it is the Panamanian people who demand sovereignty over the Canal. Your country once helped us to gain independence. But saving a person's life doesn't give you the rights to enslave him. The Canal issue is really more of a sentimental matter than an economic one. We do not wish to remain slaves.

Senator Dole: As you know, I have proposed Amendments to the pending Panama Canal Treaties in order to better protect vital American interests. Congress should not just be a rubber stamp in this situation. I wonder if you have thought about your reaction if the Senate should ratify these Treaties with Amendments or Reservations?

General Torrijos: I don't want to be cast in a position of intransigence. I would say, let's keep talking. Much would depend upon the type of Amendments that were adopted. We don't want the kind that would keep a plebiscite going in Panama for a year.

Senator Dole: There is much concern in the United States about the relationship between your government and that of Communist Cuba. Does Castro have a good deal of influence in Panama?

General Torrijos: I am friendly with Fidel. He has not failed me. Castro is one of the few men who gave me good advice when I first became leader of Panama. He told me, "Omar, there are three things you must remember in dealing with Americans. First, never call the U.S. a second-class power. Second, never talk to them about Puerto Rico. And third, never tell them they play dirty."

In fact, we have seen the Cuban system first-hand, but do not follow it. We are not a country up for auction. We have our own personality. Many socialist countries are in our favor, but we follow our own mind.

-2-

Senator Dole: There is much concern among the American people about allegations that you and your family may be involved in international drug trafficking. Do you have an answer to those allegations?

General Torrijos: Why don't you ask the United States Drug Enforcement Administration about these charges?

Senator Dole: I have, but they haven't been very cooperative. They sent me copies of their files which were heavily censored. They're playing games with us.

General Torrijos: You are touching on a problem that is very important. The Drug Enforcement Agency should tell United States Senators the full truth. I am going to send you copies of materials I have on this matter, and next week I am going to ask the U.S. drug officials to give you whatever files they may have on members of my government or my family that may be involved in drug-trafficking.

You know, of course, that it is wrong to judge a man by the actions of his relatives. I come from a moral family and don't believe any of them are involved. But if you can prove to me that any members of my government or family is involved with drugs, I will put them in jail.

Senator Dole: Another serious concern is the status of human rights in Panama.

General Torrijos: Within the next three weeks, I will be lifting some of the current restrictions on the press in Panama. And you may tell your colleagues that within one hour after the Treaties are ratified, all Panamanian exiles will be invited back home.

Senator Dole: That's good to hear. And it's good for you. You'll find it keeps your adrenaline flowing.

-30-