

Perhaps surprisingly, against this discouraging background, the five Central American Presidents again managed to salvage hope for the peace process in a mid-December summit. The Presidents placed their hopes in a strengthening of the UN/OAS role in ensuring the disbanding of Nicaraguan *contra* groups and FMLN rebels in El Salvador, with measures to stem the flow of arms to both sets of insurgents. This agreement was broadly in line with the tone of the Malta Summit discussion, where Presidents Gorbachev and Bush avoided dispute, with Mr. Bush pointedly accepting Soviet assurances of non-intervention and placing the responsibility for arms flows into El Salvador squarely on Nicaragua and Cuba.

The year-end decision of the United States to intervene militarily in Panama to overthrow the Noriega Government has re-opened a major set of dangers while finally dislodging this corrupt and constitutionally-illegitimate ruler. Many factors played a part: Noriega's probable criminality, the blatant fraud, sabotage and nullification of last May's elections, the failure of the Organization of American States (OAS) to achieve his peaceful removal, the Panamanian "declaration of war" and clear aggressive threats against American citizens, and the imminent appointment of Panamanian to head the Canal administration. In spite of all these factors, the international community, and particularly Latin Americans, (given their history) cannot accept Washington's unilateral interventions to dictate who shall govern in other countries. The 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (under which Washington claimed the right to intervene where "disorder or misconduct" occurred in the hemisphere) was supposedly repudiated in the 1920s.

Given the real stakes, and the factors at work, the Panamanian case was a genuinely thorny one for Washington, but one of the consequences of intervening will be to feed again the already-ingrained suspicion and hostility that underlies many American relationships and inhibits US effectiveness in pursuing its own and Western interests. There will be immediate spillover into other Central American issues, weakening the useful contributions that Washington can bring, and perhaps further jeopardizing the regional peace process. For Canada, the intervention provided an early, and messy, real-world test of our new membership in the OAS and the unpleasant choices it will place before us. Weighing all the factors involved, as well as the certainty that few other countries would be prepared to lend credence to the US point of view, the Canadian government made the difficult decision to offer cautious support, with some qualifications that were quickly lost in the debates. It was a very unfortunate first issue for Canada in the OAS, a