

Trafficking 'super state' forms drug war problem

WASHINGTON (AP) — A troubling challenge facing President Bush as he gropes for ways to combat drug smuggling is the emergence of a drug "super state" in Latin America, an entity with many of the trappings of a nation state.

The drug "super state" — a term once used by a Colombian attorney general shortly before he was murdered by drug traffickers last year — has a defense establishment, controls large swaths of territory, issues communiques, and even boasts what amounts to a "commerce department," which assiduously promotes the export of cocaine and other illicit drugs.

It also has what its defenders regard as a progressive political philosophy.

Diego Cordoba, a lawyer employed by Colombian drug barons, contended in an interview with a Brazilian newspaper last year that drug trafficking has done more to alleviate poverty and hunger in Latin America than any government in the region.

Another lawyer for the traffickers, Mario Arango, wrote in a best-selling book that the drug business has opened new opportunities for the underprivileged classes.

"The money from the drug traffic has acted as a brake on the social and political deterioration of the country," Arango said.

According to U.S. government figures, as much as \$1.7 billion in cocaine-generated revenues last year bolstered the economies of Peru and Bolivia, the two largest cocaine producers in the world. The figure for Colombia, the conduit for 80 percent of the cocaine consumed in the United States and Europe, is estimated at \$4 billion.

The super state boasts a formidable defense establishment. While the underfunded Colombian police have about 30 helicopters at their disposal, one single trafficker, Jorge Luis Ochoa, reportedly has 50 aircraft and an arsenal of weapons.

Unlike the Colombian government, which requires months and sometimes years to acquire weaponry for its military, the drug traffickers — unhindered by red tape — can get what they want in days or even hours.

Another characteristic of a nation state the drug lords have is the ability to declare war. After Colombian President Virgilio Barco ordered a crackdown on the drug traffickers two weeks ago — confiscating millions of dollars worth of property and arresting 11,000 suspects — the cartel issued a statement asserting the existence of a state of "absolute and total war" with the government.

Iran: Hostages may be freed if country's assets get released

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — A senior Iranian official said Monday his government had been in touch with Washington and that Western hostages in Lebanon could be freed if the United States releases Iranian assets frozen 10 years ago.

The official Islamic Republic News Agency quoted Ali Mohammad Besharati, deputy foreign minister, as saying President Bush had sent several letters, the latest three weeks ago, to "the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

In Kennebunkport, Maine, where Bush has been vacationing, White House spokesman Roman Popadiuk responded, "There has been no message sent by the president to the Iranian leadership."

Besharati said the hostages "may be released" if the United States turns loose the billions of dollars worth of assets, including military hardware, frozen after the storming of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979.

Sixteen Western hostages are held

in Lebanon, most by radical Shiite Moslems loyal to Iran. Eight are Americans and the one held longest is Terry A. Anderson, chief Middle East correspondent of the Associated Press, who was abducted March 16, 1985.

In its report on an interview with

Besharati by the English-language *Tehran Times*, the news agency he believed Bush was making greater efforts toward coming to an agreement with Iran than did Ronald Reagan.

"We see the Bush administration has tried to undo many things in the past," Besharati said.

Police fire into crowd of S. African protesters

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — Police opened fire Monday on a crowd of protesters who defied a ban on rallies and gathered at a Durban university. At least 10 people were reported injured in a stampede that followed, witnesses said.

A police official warned that the escalating series of protests keyed to Wednesday's parliamentary elections, which exclude blacks from ei-

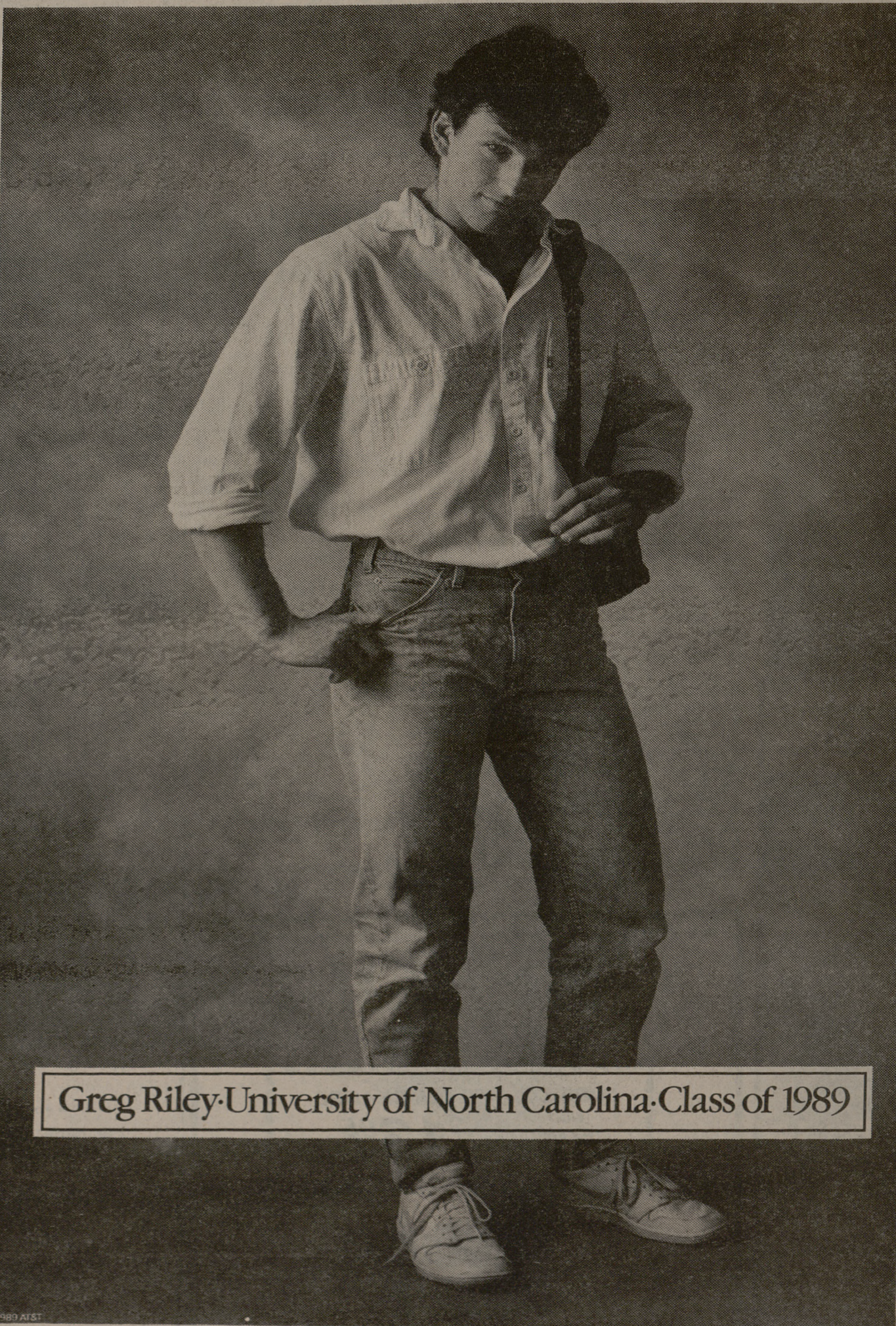
ther seeking office or voting, will be dealt with "mercilessly."

About 2,500 students at the racial University of Natal later gathered to protest the election.

Police arrested 18 protesters firing on the crowd with tear gas bullets, witnesses said, speaking

See S. Africa/Page 8

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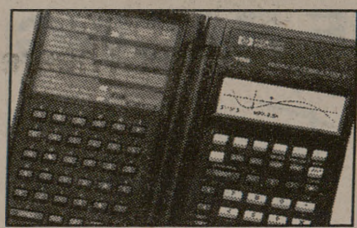
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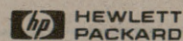


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