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U.S. Senate Approves Resolution On Panama; Panama City Responds With Indignation, Calls Oas Meeting

by Deborah Tyroler

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June 26: The Senate approved by a vote of 84 to 2 a resolution calling on the Panamanian government to restore constitutional guarantees suspended in a state of emergency in force since June 11, arrange free elections and submit the the military to civilian rule. The Senate resolution calls on the Panamanian government to conduct an independent investigation of persons accused of electoral fraud, drug trafficking and murder. In this regard, the resolution suggests that commander-in-chief of the Pamananian Defense Forces, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega and other government officials be removed from their respective positions during the investigation. Sens. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and Carl Evans (D-Mich.) proposed an amendment to the resolution to make more explicit Washington's intention to deliver the Panama Canal to Panamanian control in 1999, while also eliminating the text referring to Gen. Noriega and removal of persons from their current positions pending the conclusion of the "independent investigation." The amendment was not approved. Dodd and Evans cast the two dissenting votes. The resolution, similar to one approved by oral vote in the House Foreign Affairs Committee, makes note of the fact that Noriega's military power dominates the executive, judiciary and legislative branches of government. [The current state of tension between Washington and Panama City is the most serious since 1964 when Panama broke diplomatic relations with the United States. Pent-up resentment against the United States surfaced when US authorities prevented Panamanian students from raising their national flag alongside the US flag at a high school in the Canal Zone. "Within hours, 30,000 Panamanians were in the streets of Panama City, confronting US troops had had orders to fire warning shots before shooting to kill. The riot soon spread to Colon, on the Atlantic side of the Zone, then deep into the interior...By the time this explosion of anti-Yankee fury was contained, over \$2 million in property had been burned or otherwise destroyed almost all of it American. Twenty-eight people had been killed, 300 wounded, and 500 arrested, almost all of them Panamanian." (From NACLA Report on the Americas, September/October 1979, p. 13.) Of the 28 persons killed, 22 were Panamanian citizens.] June 27: In a statement released by the office of the presidency in Panama City, attributed to Panamanian President Eric Arturo Delvalle, the Senate resolution was described as "inconceivable," "inacceptable," and an "intolerable intervention in Panama's domestic affairs." "For the Panamanian government, it is inconceivable that the United States intends to deliberately dictate policy to a foreign government." This action, said the statement, is "openly contradictory" to principles of independence and liberty contained in the US constitution. The US action, according to Delvalle, "merits repudiation by citizens of all free nations throughout the world." Panamanian Ambassador to the US, Dominador K. Bazan, returned to Panama City, on orders by President Delvalle. June 29: The Panamanian National Assembly adopted a resolution condemning the US Senate for its criticism of Panamanian strongman Gen. Manuel Noriega and calling on President Delvalle to retaliate by expelling US Ambassador Arthur H. Davis. The expulsion was requested on the basis of Davis's "interventionist" behavior during recent disturbances in Panama following the disclosure of accusations against Noriega. According to the US Embassy, Davis met with government officials and members of the political opposition in an attempt "to help in the return to

normalcy." US State Department officials said that it would take a day or two to gauge whether the move portends an escalation of tensions between the United States and Panama or whether it was what one official called "some political breast beating" orchestrated by Noriega's supporters. The assembly adopted its resolution by a vote of 39 to 0. None of the 22 opposition deputies attended the session. State Department officials noted that any decision to expel Davis would have to be made by Noriega. Davis, a political appointee, is a Colorado businessman with extensive experience in Latin America. State Department spokesman Charles Redman reported that Secretary of State Shultz had called on the Panamanian government to lift the state of emergency and declared that the United States could not be neutral in matters concerning the necessity of democracy. Redman reiterated that the United States will comply with the 1977 treaties with Panama by delivering the Panama Canal to Panamanian control in late 1999. He then told reporters that the US cannot be neutral regarding the necessity of complete support for democratic procedures. This principle, he said, was applied in relations with all nations in Latin America, without exception. Next, Redman stated that Shultz supported the Senate resolution only in part. He said the Department was in agreement with the resolution regarding support for democratic procedures and repudiation of the suspension of civil rights in the recent state of emergency. "We regret, however, that the Senate opted to reject the amendment proposed by Senators Dodd and Evans." Redman noted that a June 29 statement by Foreign Minister Abadia to Secretary Shultz said that his government continues to maintain cordial relations with the United States. June 30: Panama requested a review by the political council of the Organization of American States (OAS) of the circumstances provoking tensions in US-Panamanian relations. The council meeting was scheduled to take place July 1 in Washington, 2 p.m. local time. The Panamanian Ambassador Roberto Leyton said he wished to inform the council of his government's objections to the US Senate's resolution. Specifically, he said the resolution's suggestion that Gen. Noriega and other persons implicated in illegal acts be removed from their positions pending the conclusion of an "independent investigation" is improper. Such matters, he said, are under the exclusive competence of the Panamanian government's internal juridical order. OAS norms establish that any member of the organization can request a meeting of the council. Leyton is expected to go beyond the Senate action, in denouncing "interventionist" activities by US Ambassador Arthur Davis. (Basic data from AP, Agence France Presse, Washington Post)

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