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## **Abrams Reportedly Offers Panamanian President Deal: If Noriega & Friends Leave Country, Indictments Dropped**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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According to Justice Department spokesperson John K. Russell, Asst. Secretary of State Elliott Abrams told Panamanian President Eric Arturo Delvalle that indictments against Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega would be dropped in the general and his top associates go into exile. Justice reportedly said it told the State Department that it would oppose dropping the indictments. Meanwhile, on Feb. 18, the State Department said a deal was proposed by Delvalle and not Abrams. Through a spokesperson, Abrams indicated he had not agreed to any deal. A State spokesperson quoted Abrams as informing Delvalle, "What is certain is that Noriega has to go." According to congressional staff members cited by the New York Times, after meeting with Delvalle, Abrams informed certain officials in Washington about his conversation and asked them how Congress would react if the indictments were dropped and if Noriega and certain aides left the country. Prior to the release of indictments against Noriega for numerous counts related to drug trafficking, State was apparently generally receptive to a plan prepared by Jose I. Bandon, that included immunity from prosecution for Noriega and his top aides if they removed themselves from politics. State Department officials cited by the Times said there was recognition by some in the administration that dropping the indictments might be the only means of seeing Noriega withdraw from politics. (Basic data from New York Times, 02/19/88)

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