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## **Panama: Summary Of Recent Developments, Statements**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

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May 11: As reported by the New York Times (05/12/88), Michael Kozak, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, has been in Panama for the last week negotiating with Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, administration officials and Panamanian opposition leaders said. Details of the Reagan administration's proposal were apparently decided in a series of meetings at the State Department and the White House on May 10. According to some administration officials, the date of Noriega's proposed departure has yet to be determined. Last week, before returning to Panama, Kozak reportedly told Capital Hill staff members that if Noriega demanded that the drug-related indictments be dropped as the first step toward his resignation, the US might have to go along, an unnamed leading congressional staffer said. Kozak also reportedly said at the time that the goal of US policy was Noriega's departure from power, not necessarily his departure from the country, the staff member related. Television channel 2 in Panama City reported that Reagan had sent personal representatives to meet with Noriega to negotiate his retirement. News reports in Panama also indicated that the negotiations included an offer to drop the drug-related indictments against Noriega in the US, if the general agreed to step down from power and leave the country. Other reports indicated that Noriega had accepted an agreement under which the indictments would be dropped, and he would leave the country in August. The general had also reportedly agreed to remain outside Panama until after the upcoming elections, and inauguration of the new president in 1990. Government sources informed Prensa Latina that no agreement, or aspect of an agreement, had been accepted by Gen. Noriega. In Miami, Federal Judge Leon Kellner, whose office presented one of the indictments against Noriega, told AP that he was aware of the proposal, but not of the details. Panama's acting President Manuel Solis Palma said US reports about a Cuban military presence in Panama are simply lies. In a statement delivered from David, capital of Chiriqui province, about 450 km. west of Panama City, Solis Palma said that Cuban aid consists mainly of medical supplies. The president said he was astonished upon learning of statements by US Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci on May 10. Carlucci said he was uncomfortable with the growing Cuban presence in Panama, describing the same as a threat to Canal security. May 12: While the White House claimed no agreement with Noriega had been reached, the Reagan administration came under fire by members of Congress, law enforcement officials and Panamanian opposition leaders. According to an unnamed senior White House official cited by the Times (05/13/88), Reagan accepted the proposal to drop the indictments after some officials at the meeting argued that Noriega's presence in power was a growing threat to national security. The cited official said, "It's no longer just a drug problem. It's also a national security problem because of increasing Cuban influence in Panama. There was no stomach for using military force, and we want that guy out." Sen. Alfonse M. D'Amato (R-NY) described the proposal to drop the indictments as a "devastating blow to those of us who have been attempting to say that the United States is committed internationally and at home to the war on drugs." Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) said the offer "would send a disastrous message in terms of drug fighting to Latin America and would say effectively that the United States can be held up and that crime pays." According to Gabriel Lewis Galindo, opposition leader and former Panamanian Ambassador to the US, "Unless General Noriega leaves the country you cannot have stability, which is precisely what Panama needs at the moment to recover its economic

strength." Judge Leon Kellner met with Attorney General Edwin Meese to argue against dropping the charges against Noriega. Romulo Escobar Betancourt, head of the Revolutionary Democratic Party, and a political adviser to Noriega, told reporters in Panama that dismissal of the indictments was not being discussed in the negotiations. Escobar is reportedly Noriega's representative in talks with Kozak. Escobar said Noriega is demanding the suspension of economic sanctions against Panama, reparations for damage to the nation's economy, a reduced profile of the US military in Panama, and the formation of an interim government in Panama, perhaps through a national dialogue that would include the general's participation. (Basic data from several reports by AP, Prensa Latina, New York Times)

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