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Panama: Reaction To U.S. Covert Action To Influence Elections

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April 23: In a speech, presidential candidate for the pro-government National Liberation Coalition (COLINA), Carlos Duque, said that the US covert aid constituted "brazen intervention" in Panama's election campaign. He added that he believed the actual amount of aid was much greater than $10 million. In an interview with Notimex earlier in the day, Duque said that on May 7 "excuses for excluding Panama from the Group of 8...will end." He added that if Panama is not reincorporated into G-8, the government would seek other "forms of being a Latin American ally in the struggle for peace." Duque asserted that it must be recalled that the Contadora Group effectively originated in Panama. Contadora member-nations (Mexico, Panama, Colombia and Venezuela) sponsored numerous initiatives to peacefully resolve the Central American conflict. Later, the Contadora Support Group was formed (Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Uruguay). G-8 was established by the nations of both groups as a forum to discuss and formulate common positions on the foreign debt, trade, and other economic and political issues. Panamanian participation in the Group of 8 was suspended by the other seven member-nations last year when President Eric Arturo Delvalle was deposed.

April 24: Pro-government newspaper Critica published a front-page headline referring to opposition presidential candidate Guillermo Endara as follows: "Bush Buys Endara With $10 Million So He Will Provide Military Bases and Revise Treaties." Opposition candidate Guillermo Endara denied receiving any campaign funds from the United States. April 25: The Panamanian government requested an emergency meeting of the Security Council to hear its claim of "flagrant intervention" by Washington in its economy and political system. Panama's ambassador to the United Nations, Leonardo Kam, requested the council meeting. In a televised address, President Manuel Solis Palma said that the US administration is pursuing a criminal policy aimed at overthrowing his government. Solis Palma asserted that the Bush administration must be aware that Panama is prepared to defend its interests in the UN Security Council, and retains the right to take measures deemed necessary to rebuff Washington's aggressive policies. Next, the president said the hostile actions against Panama promoted by Washington are a gross violation of the UN and Organization of American States charters, and of the Panama Canal Treaty. Solis continued by declaring that his government has delivered strong protests to Washington in connection with its unprecedented intervention in Panamanian domestic affairs evidenced, in part, by the US president's secret directive allocating over $10 million to the opposition for campaigning in the May 7 general elections. Solis Palma mentioned the recent arrest of US citizen Kurt Frederick Muse, who operated a clandestine radio and television network, and numerous "provocations" against Panamanians by US troops stationed at the Southern Command. Washington's policy, said the president, poses a serious threat not only to the Panamanian people, but to other Latin American nations struggling for freedom, independence and the right to self-determination. (Basic data from Notimex, 04/23/89; AP, Notimex, New York Times, 04/24/89, 04/25/89; Tass, 04/25/89)