Election Day In Panama: Summary Of Events & Statements, Part 2

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May 7: Notimex reported that voting activities throughout the country appeared to peaceful. According to the National Electoral Tribunal, members of the eight parties under COLINA number 611,934. Members of the three parties which constitute ADOC, the opposition coalition, number 124,079. Finally, Authentic Panamenista Party members total 41,159. Former president Jimmy Carter was expected to visit polling places in Panama City, and in 10 other cities. He told reporters on Sunday morning he confident the elections would be honest, and that results would be respected. Opposition presidential candidate Guillermo Endara asserted that his supporters would "go to the streets" to defend his victory at the polls. This and other comments were recorded when he arrived to cast his ballot at the Catholic La Salle school in Panama City. Hundreds of supporters were gathered outside the school, most from Panama's upper classes. Endara said ADOC would release its own vote count late Sunday evening. COLINA announced plans to release results of its own vote count on Sunday evening. The Panamanian government prohibited both domestic and foreign reporters from distributing any unofficial election results. The US Embassy said "valid results" will be released Monday by the US delegation. Official observers are present at all voting places, and at district and national electoral tribunals. After ballots are counted at polling stations, representatives of all 12 parties participating in the elections must sign a document approving the tally. The signed document will then be forwarded to the national Electoral Council, and copies dispatched to local and district level tribunals. Panamanians waited in long lines Sunday to vote. Several polling stations, citing lack of special seals, opened late in the capital, where about one-half of the country's 1.18 million registered voters live. More than 200 foreign observers were on hand to monitor the voting. A spokesperson for the Southern Command in the canal zone said official US observers were able to move freely around the capital to monitor the voting during the morning. Informal exit polls by the Agence France-Presse in the wealthy district of Cangrejo and the poor suburb of San Miguelito indicated that ADOC was ahead by a wide margin. In Washington during a televised interview, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney said the United States had major obligations to defend the canal treaty and to defend the canal. "It will be an important US asset through the end of the century," he said. At about 3 p.m., the first clash between the pro-government and opposition coalitions occurred, but without violence. When Duque arrived at the Belisario Porras school in the San Francisco suburb, ADOC supporters who had virtually occupied the school, sang and chanted anti-COLINA slogans. Outside the building, COLINA supporters were assembled, and countered with their own slogans and songs. Adding to partisan tensions, candidate Endara made a surprise visit to the school before Duque departed. According to a statement by Cable Network News (CNN), the Panamanian government had cut off its broadcast transmissions on the elections after invoking a law which prohibits distribution of unofficial election results. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) told reporters that members of the armed forces had voted in more than one place and frequently arrived at polling places without the necessary documents. Carter told CNN that the vote seemed to take place without major incidence of fraud. At a press conference in Washington, Juan Bautista Sosa, Panama's Ambassador to the US (recognized only by Washington),...
the international community will have the moral right to intervene in Panama if economic interests are endangered result of the electoral fraud. He added that while the concept of intervention is currently unfashionable, Cuba intervenes in Panama by providing intelligence, ammunition and weapons to Noriega which are used to repress Panamanians. Bautista Sosa claimed that Libya had provided $24 million to Noriega's regime. Next, he told reporters that the opposition had established an information center on the elections, called "Panama Libre," in his Washington offices, and another in Miami. The source of the centers' information is an ADOC vote counting and observation office based in San Jose, Costa Rica. He asserted that "the Panamanian people will...unleash intense activity against fraud" if Gen. Noriega proclaims a COLINA victory. In the case of fraud, said Bautista Sosa, "we believe that all America will isolate Panama...The country will become an economic threat not only to Central America but to the entire hemisphere." He pointed out that 50% of Latin American trade, 40% of US trade, and 35% of Japanese trade, passes through the Canal. Bautista Sosa said he questioned the authenticity of statements by foreign observers since they were permitted to visit polling places where irregularities did not occur. Next, he declared that Carter's support for Panamanian election results would be "very dangerous." According to Bosco Vallarino, member of the Panamanian Embassy staff in Washington (recognized only by the US government), a Dutch Catholic priest, Nico Van Cleer, was shot in the face by a member of Panama's militia, called "dignity battalions." He told Notimex that the priest, who had resided in Panama for the past 14 years, was shot with a Soviet-made AK-47 rifle. The incident occurred in Santa Maria, Chiriqui province. Next, according to Vallarino, Panamanian soldiers had detained an undetermined number of election observers from Costa Rica, Spain, Norway and Holland. Vallarino also reported on an exit poll of 1,022 persons conducted by Analistas Políticos Americanos (APA) on Sunday morning. The poll gave opposition candidates 55.1% of the votes, compared to 39.5% for COLINA. A report on the exit poll was received from ADOC in Costa Rica. Vallarino provided no information on the headquarters or founders of APA, nor of where the exit poll was conducted. The APA exit poll reportedly indicated that ADOC National Assembly candidates received 52.7% of the votes, compared to 42.2% for COLINA candidates. The APA said 16.1% of voters arriving at the polls were clad in some type of uniform. Vallarino said that in Chitre, five Costa Rican observers were detained by the military and taken to the airport in Tocumen "presumably for deportation." Other arrests occurred in Santiago de Veraguas, and in Atalaya, Veraguas. Notimex said the death of the Dutch priest and the detention of foreign observers could not be immediately confirmed. Jurgen Koch, a West German observer invited by Panama's human rights commission, told AP: "They (the government) tried to put on a nice play, but it wasn't Shakespeare." In remarks to reporters, Carter said, "The only problem I've seen is with the number of voters," referring to the long lines of voters as he visited polls at the Torrijos-Carter Elementary School in the working class San Miguelito suburb. He said there had been complaints in some precincts about ballots arriving late, but that such problems did not seem to have occurred at the places he visited. Sen. McCain said his group had seen irregularities. "The general belief is that the election will be stolen sometime tonight," McCain said as polls closed at 5 p.m. "We've seen many irregularities but it is difficult to judge the extent of the irregularities," he said. Mayor Edward Koch, a member of the official US delegation, repeated complaints by pollwatchers from the opposition Christian Democratic Party that hundreds of voters had been instructed to go to certain voting stations in precincts known to favor the opposition, only to get there and be told they were not registered. He added that Panama "tolerated observers but did not let them get to close to the action." According to a report by AFP, the first official results from 22 polling stations in middle- and upper-class areas of Panama City, gave Endara 3,717 votes to 939 for Duque. Unofficial results in the town of San
Francisco gave Endara 661 votes to 240 for Duque with four ballot boxes counted, officials said. The polling firm Gallup de Espana predicted Duque would win 50.9% of the vote against 44.7% for Endara. A spokeswoman told AFP the forecast was based on interviews with 18,000 Panamanian voters in 110 locations. Gallup predicted a 4.3% share of the vote for Hildebrando Nicosia of the Authentic Panamenista Party. At a news conference Sunday night, Endara said, "Despite all the irregularities, the opposition has triumphed." He claimed to have won by a 2-to-1 margin over Duque. ADOC leaders called for street demonstrations Monday to protest what they said would be a certain but fraudulent win for Duque. (Basic data from numerous reports by AP, AFP, Notimex, Xinhua, 05/07/89)

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