Panama: Discussion In U.S. Congress On Potential Military Response, Bill To Defer Treaty Obligation

Deborah Tyroler
Panama: Discussion In U.S. Congress On Potential Military Response, Bill To Defer Treaty Obligation

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, May 19, 1989

On May 18, during a hearing of the House Merchant Marine Subcommittee on the Panama Canal, Deputy Asst. Secretary of Defense Richard C. Brown said that Panama had violated the Canal treaties over 1,200 times in the last 15 months by harassing US military personnel and dependents. Michael Rhode, Jr., secretary of the Panama Canal Commission, said some shippers were considering diverting cargo and traffic from the canal due to concerns about the security of the waterway as long as Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega is in power. Rhode rejected the idea of abrogating the Canal treaties: "If you really want to cement Noriega's position, do something like that. It would be a mistake." Brown said the US was prepared to use military force to protect US citizens in Panama. Unidentified Pentagon and State Department officials cited by the New York Times said that harassments provided a basis for military action if the US decided to retaliate. On the same day, Sen. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) offered a bill that would defer the next step toward Panamanian control of the canal until President Bush certifies that there is a democratically elected government. Under the treaties, a Panamanian is supposed to replace a US citizen as administrator of the canal on Jan 1. Sen. Bob Dole (R-KS), minority leader, said the change should not occur if Noriega continues his hold on power. [On May 18, Luis Anderson, a member of the nine-member directorate of the Panama Canal Commission since 1983, resigned to protest what he described as government brutality and violations of civil rights. According to AP, Anderson was the second Panamanian member to resign this year.] (Basic data from AP, 05/18/89; New York Times, 05/19/89)

-- End --