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Panama: Domestic Debate On Means Toward Peaceful Transition Of Power

by Deborah Tyroler

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May 30: On Tuesday evening, the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) reiterated its invitation to the Civic Opposition Democratic Alliance (ADOC) to "dialogue with the aim of finding a political solution" the country's crisis, "without outside orders or interference." The PRD is Panama's pro-government majority party. May 31: ADOC declared its willingness to "talk directly with General Manuel Antonio Noriega and the Defense Forces with no pre-conditions." In a statement, ADOC said such dialogue should produce a "national accord between civilians, from whom we received the popular mandate on May 7, and the military, which at present holds all public power in its hands." Next, the statement declared that the opposition will respect the "institutional integrity of the Defense Forces," nor will it seek "revenge...against our adversaries, but rather the reconciliation of all Panamanians...so that together we can undertake national reconstruction." June 3: According to a report by Notimex, as of this weekend, pro-government parties have offered several proposals for completing a peaceful transition of power on Sept. 1, the deadline under the country's constitution. Consensus among the eight pro-government parties in the National Liberation Coalition (COLINA) does not exist. Dialogue or negotiations between opposition and pro-government parties has not yet taken place. According to a recent issue of daily newspaper Estrella de Panama, four COLINA parties have proposed the creation of a three-member "national reconstruction junta" to take charge Sept. 1. One member would be selected by pro-government parties, another by opposition parties, and the third, by the Panamanian Defense Forces. comprised of three persons, among them a representative of the Defense Forces. Members of a Constitutional Assembly would also be appointed at this time. The Assembly would debate and draft constitutional reforms for one year. The four COLINA members proposing the junta are the Labor, People's, National Action and Democratic Workers parties (PALA, PP, PAN and PDT) parties. The PRD reportedly does not support the four parties' proposal. June 5: Citing informed sources who requested anonymity, Notimex reported that members of the PRD have requested assistance from certain governments to persuade Gen. Noriega to step down as PDF commander-in-chief. These sources said Noriega's hold on power is becoming increasingly precarious, particularly in the wake of the May 17 emergency meeting of OAS member-nations' foreign ministers, and the near expulsion of Panama from the Group of 8. The foreign ministers of Argentina, Peru and Venezuelan were reportedly ready to propose Panama's replacement with another country. (Basic data from Xinhua, 05/31/89; Notimex, 06/03/89, 06/05/89)

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