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Panamanian Talks Break Down: Summary Of Events & Statements

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Aug. 17, the Civic Democratic Opposition Alliance (ADOC) walked out of talks with the government and armed forces to protest state intervention in a private radio and television network. The talks commenced in July under the auspices of a mediation team sent by the Organization of American States (OAS) to arrange a transfer of power by Sept. 1, when President Manuel Solis Palma's term expires as stipulated by the Panamanian constitution. The talks resumed Aug. 18. ADOC leader Guillermo Endara said that the positions of the opposition coalition and the government are "radically opposed" even irreconcilable but that the opposition would continue at the talks "to show we are good Panamanians." ADOC leader Ricardo Arias Calderon said the dialogue was resumed "in a last attempt" to solve the crisis. In separate statements, ADOC leaders said they had rejected government proposals for the establishment of a coalition government. On Aug. 21, the talks broke off, reportedly with little hope of resumption before the September deadline. OAS foreign ministers were scheduled to convene Aug. 23 to discuss the mediation commission's report on the Panamanian situation. The commission is comprised of OAS secretary general Joao Baena Soares, and the foreign ministers of Guatemala, Ecuador and Trinidad and Tobago. In an Aug. 22 report by Notimex, unidentified Latin American diplomats were cited as saying many fear that a perceived failure by the OAS to assist in bringing about a resolution to the Panamanian crisis will be interpreted by the US as a green light to resume a policy of unilateral action. Next, according to the same diplomats, it is understood that if the OAS commission fails in its appointed task, the US will continue to hold back on contributions to the organization's budget. At present, Washington's arrears total more than \$50 million. The financial crisis affecting the OAS is largely the result of the failure by the US and several other member-nations to make timely payments of respective contributions. On Tuesday, Gen. Noriega said the opposition had "committed an historic error" by rejecting offers made by the government and military toward establishing a coalition government. "They were offered half of the government... They committed an error of useful dummies, being programmed to always say no." In a joint statement released Aug. 22 from Montevideo (Uruguay), diplomats from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela said that any attempt to impose a unilateral solution on Panama would pose grave danger. The seven countries are members of an organization known as the Group of Eight or the Rio Group. Panama is the eighth member, but was suspended last year by the other seven when Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega effectively deposed President Eric Arturo Delvalle. (Basic data from AFP, 08/18/89, 08/22/89; UPI, 08/21/89; Notimex, 08/22/89)

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