10-11-1989

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Deborah Tyroler

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Panama Attempted Coup Aftermath: Summary Of Events & Statements, Part 2

(by Deborah Tyroler
Category/Department: General
Published: Wednesday, October 11, 1989)

Oct. 7: The government closed down the private radio station La Exitosa for "propagating false news." The station carried a statement by rebel officers during the Oct. 3 attempted coup. Chairperson of the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD), Carlos Duque, confirmed that the party's executive was drawing up emergency laws, to be decreed by provisional President Francisco Rodriguez within a few days. He said they would include a new military code, a revised penal code, emergency financial regulations, and new regulations covering newspapers, radio and TV. Duque said the laws would establish norms for the suspension or dismissal of public employees "who are not loyal and patriotic." He also mentioned new regulations on "the registration of foreign agents in Panama." In an interview with television network CNN, White House Chief of Staff John Sununu Saturday said there was an eight-to-five chance that Noriega will be deposed within the next six months. He asserted that the US failure to intervene in the attempted coup did not mean Washington was giving up trying to force his fall from power. Oct. 8: Editions of the government-owned La Republica newspaper were filled with articles praising Noriega and photos of the general. In a message from Noriega broadcast on nationwide television and radio at the end of an editorial on a military news program, the general thanked Panamanians for "the demonstrations of moral and spiritual support that reinforced the position of MAN (Manuel Antonio Noriega) and of his men in the critical moment when the fate of Panama and its national liberation movement were at stake." "Those who think that the cause will fail if one man falls are mistaken," he said. According to AP, more than 60 soldiers and civilians, including three members of Noriega's general staff, have been arrested in the crackdown since the attempted coup. The Washington Post reported that US forces in Panama were authorized to take Noriega into custody, but the message did not arrive until the attempted coup was near collapse. The report said Gen. Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, relayed the authorization to the head of US forces in Panama, Gen. Maxwell Thurman, in a phone call early Tuesday afternoon. Powell instructed Thurman not to make any visible show of US force, but to move undercover if he chose to move Noriega to a US base. The Post cited sources close to the Southern Command who said the rebels asked the US Army twice to bring a helicopter to take Noriega away. The Bush administration has denied that US forces were requested to fetch Noriega. In interviews with the New York Times in Panama, unidentified diplomats said Noriega exploded in rage against his captured opponents and ordered the immediate execution of several rebel officers. The diplomats said the killings were the beginning of a crackdown within the Panamanian military including torture and possible execution of dozens. According to official Panamanian military figures, 10 soldiers died in the coup attempt and 26 people were wounded, including five civilians. Diplomats and military analysts have pointed out that despite a pitched battle with automatic weapons and mortars, the government figures report no deaths among the soldiers loyal to Noriega. The diplomats noted that the government's casualty figures show that all but two of the dead men were officers, and the others were sergeants, suggesting that no lower rank enlisted men were killed. Hundreds were seen to be involved in the fighting. Oct. 9: Panamanian opposition leader and former vice presidential candidate, Ricardo Arias Calderon, told journalists that the attempted
Coup has weakened Noriega's "regime of assassination." He called on the government to provide the exact number of deaths occurring during the rebellion, and the circumstances under which all military personnel were killed. Arias Calderon said that many arrested soldiers had in fact been killed. Coup leader Maj. Moises Giroldi, 38, was buried. Capt. Leon Tejada, another rebel officer, was buried at the same church over the weekend. Opposition leader Guillermo Endara ended a 19-day hunger strike, and said he entered a clinic to "normalize my body's system." Endara's action was undertaken to attract attention to an opposition campaign to delay paying taxes and utility bills. At a news conference, Endara said the opposition did not approve of the coup because it represented "Noriegaism without Noriega," not a movement toward democracy. Oct. 10: At a press conference in Caracas, Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez accused Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega's regime of executing rebel officers imprisoned after the coup attempt. He called upon Latin American nations to take "strong collective action" against Noriega. Perez said, "In Panama there is no longer a constitutional regime, but a simple military dictatorship...engaging in dramatic excesses." The president said he had reports that "with a great deal of precision...officers of the Panamanian Defense Forces have been executed while in prison." Perez said military intervention "would be a tragedy for the whole continent." He added that Latin American action undertaken "in solidarity with the Panamanian people" would spare the region worse evils. The president declared that Latin America was allowing a military dictatorship in Panama despite its repudiation of attempts to overthrow civilian governments in Argentina, Ecuador and Peru by force. Such a position, he said, "could be a dangerous sign of regression for Latin America's democratic process. It compels us to see...a dictatorship in Panama as a threat for the entire continent." Unfortunately, said Perez, Panama's political situation may be used as a pretext to avoid fulfillment of the Canal treaties which stipulate that in January 1990 a Panamanian will head the Canal Commission. White House spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater confirmed that the US had evacuated several rebel officers and their families to Miami. State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler said 42 Panamanian refugees had been admitted to the US on humanitarian grounds, including family members of coup leader, Maj. Moises Giroldi. According to Notimex, one of the coup leaders who managed to escape, Capt. Javier Licona, was among the refugees. Tutwiler said the US Catholic Conference would provide assistance to the refugees, and that the Immigration and Naturalization Service would review requests for political asylum if they are made. (Basic data from Copley News Service, 10/05/89, 10/06/89, 10/08/89; New York Times, 10/06/89, 10/09/89; Notimex, 10/06/89, 10/10/89; AFP, 10/07/89, 10/10/89; AP, 10/06/89, 10/08-10/89; Xinhua, 10/09/89; DPA, 10/08/89; Washington Post, 10/08/89)

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