

12-15-1989

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### Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Panama: Chronology Of Selected Developments, Nov. 7-dec. 11." (1989). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/3612>

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## **Panama: Chronology Of Selected Developments, Nov. 7-dec. 11**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

*Published: Friday, December 15, 1989*

Nov. 7: Defense Department spokesperson Fred Hoffman told reporters that US troops guarding a US installation on the island of Galeta near the Panama Canal exchanged gunfire with a small group of unidentified intruders on Nov. 3. He said no one was believed shot, although one US soldier was injured when he fell on barbed wire. The US Southern Command confirmed that some 200 personnel had been involved in a military exercise close to the Panama Canal. US troops have conducted about 30 such exercises since May, in actions denounced by Panamanian authorities as "intimidation." Nov. 9: The La Republica newspaper reported that Panamanian officials had lodged a formal protest against the passage of a US nuclear submarine through the Canal. According to officials, the Nov. 4 passage had not been authorized through proper channels. Nov. 12: Haiti's military government declared Panamanian Ambassador Rafael Vargas Santos persona non grata for allegedly interfering in Haiti's internal affairs. Also accused of meddling in domestic affairs were the ambassador's wife, Eulalia Garcia Obando de Vargas who served as an embassy counselor, and embassy attache Rafael Samuco. The three left the country on Nov. 12. The move against the diplomats came after Vargas appeared at the Justice Palace Nov. 9 to lend his moral support to three opposition leaders who were arrested Nov. 1 and charged with conspiring against the government. In an interview with the private television network Tele-Haiti in the previous week, Vargas said he was offering his support to the suspects because they and some of the labor and political organizations to which they belonged had supported Panama in the past. US Embassy officials have said the prisoners' appearance on television the day after their arrest indicated they had been abused. Nov. 15: In Washington at Organization of American States (OAS) headquarters, the Rio Group (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela) submitted a resolution requesting that the Panamanian government organize free elections as soon as possible. The resolution reiterated respect for the principles of self-determination and non-intervention in foreign nations' domestic affairs. Nov. 16: US press sources reported that \$3 million have been approved for a covert operation aimed at ousting, kidnapping or assassinating Gen. Noriega. When asked about the plan, President Bush would neither confirm nor deny that he had approved a CIA plan to remove the general. Nov. 19: A group calling itself the Patriotic Youth Command (CPJP) warned it would kill anybody who attempted to assassinate Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega. The Command was formed Nov. 17 after US press reports indicated Washington may be planning to oust or kill Noriega. "The blood of all the treacherous North Americans and Panamanians will flow through Panama" if Gen. Noriega were assassinated, said the Command. The group also said the \$3 million the CIA reportedly has earmarked for ousting Gen. Noriega "will serve to deliver flowers to the traitors." The CPJP also published a list of people whom it called "the first 50 traitors" in a pro-government newspaper. Dec. 3: According to a report by Notimex, heavily armed US soldiers supervise the movements of Panamanians and foreigners near Southern Command military bases to prevent "bomb threats." The soldiers set up barricades comprised of concrete blocks and barbed wire surrounding checkpoints at the Howard military complex, and combat planes flew overhead. According to Notimex, most Panamanians are indifferent to the military

patrols throughout the work week. The situation changes on weekends, however, since they must request "permission" from US soldiers to visit nearby beaches. The most affected are residents of the Arraijan, Veracruz, La Chorrera, and Gamboa neighborhoods, located near the Canal Zone. Residents complain of continual incursions by Southern Command troops. The Howard complex is located some 20 km. west of Panama City. Access to the Kobbe Beach requires passage through part of the US military base. Recently, the Southern Command ordered safety precautions, which include closing off access to the beach. Dec. 4: According to National Assembly member, Jorge Isaac Chandeck, Southern Command chief Gen. Maxwell Thurman and Army Gen. Marck Cisneros will be declared fugitives from Panamanian justice if they fail to respond on Dec. 6 to a civil suit against the Command. Chandeck filed the charges against the two officers, who are described as responsible for "disruption of the citizenry's tranquility resulting from mobilization of troops, armored vehicles, helicopters and fighter planes." Chandeck said that in addition to 16 other violations, the two were charged with "threatening peaceful citizens with firearms, [and] damage to public and private property..." Panamanian officials say soldiers under the Southern Command stepped up military maneuvers and other actions in areas outside their jurisdiction two weeks ago. Dec. 11: Panamanian judicial authorities labeled Gens. Cisneros and Thurman "fugitives from justice" after they reportedly ignored charges handed down by a Panamanian magistrate. Magistrate Alex Jaen told journalists that Panamanian Major Ruben Rodriguez had served citations on the generals but that they had failed to present themselves to authorities as required. Southern Command spokesperson Mercedes Morris called the demand "an act of propaganda in violation of the canal treaties." (Basic data from AFP, 11/07/89, 11/12/89, 11/19/89, 12/11/89; Notimex, 11/15/89, 12/03/89, 12/04/89; Xinhua, 11/09/89, 11/22/89)

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