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Update On Reactions To U.S. Military Action In Panama

by Deborah Tyroler

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Dec. 20: With the assistance of major allies on the UN Security Council, the US stalled deliberations while pressing for recognition of a new UN ambassador to be appointed by Endara. Diplomats told AP that Endara was expected to appoint Eduardo Vallarino, a Panamanian businessperson in self-imposed exile in the US. Panama has no ambassador currently accredited at the United Nations. The previous permanent representative, Leonardo Kam, was promoted to foreign minister, and no one had taken his place. The government of provisional president Francisco Rodriguez is reportedly trying to have its ambassador to the European Community, Merla Bellavita, accredited as its UN ambassador. Nicaraguan ambassador to the UN, Alejandro Serrano Caldera, who called for an emergency Security Council meeting, said that "the United States has no legal or ethical right to intervene in other countries' affairs." He said, "We want the council to call for an immediate withdrawal of the US troops." Washington claimed it had the right to intervene under Article 51 of the UN Charter, "which provides for the use of armed force to defend a country, to defend our interests and our people, it's the so-called 'self-defense article.'" * Peruvian President Alan Garcia recalled his ambassador to the US. Garcia condemned the move as a US attempt to retain control of the canal that is slated to be handed over to Panama in 2000 under the guise of protecting democracy. He also postponed a drug summit scheduled for February. Nicaragua put its troops on a state of alert, fearing a US invasion. "This is an imperialist robbery that endangers the sovereignty of Latin America," Garcia said. Garcia also expressed surprise that Guillermo Endara supported in advance the US plan to lead a "puppet government" of the United States, calling it a betrayal of Endara's mandate. US actions were "intended to hide the real purpose of breaking the 1977 Canal Treaty and to install a docile government to allow military bases to stay in Panama as...a permanent threat to the continent," Garcia said. The Peruvian leader called for the suspension of the anti-drug summit slated for Feb. 16 in Cartagena, Colombia. The meeting was to be attended by the leaders of Peru, Colombia, Bolivia and the United States. * In a communique, the French foreign ministry said "recourse to the use of force was always regrettable and cannot be approved." France "hopes that peace returns to Panama and that its people themselves are able to assert control over their own fate," the statement said. * Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile said they "lamented" the invasion. Mexico and Venezuela condemned the operation, although Caracas went on to recognize the new leadership after US troops have vacated. * In Havana, tens of thousands demonstrated against the US invasion, and some pledged support to Panama, radio and television reports said. Several thousand protestors, most students, chanted anti-US slogans and demonstrated along Havana's main boulevard across the street from the US Interests Section, which represents the United States in diplomatic matters in Cuba. There were demonstrations across the country, the reports said. State-run radio and television broadcast minute-to-minute reports on developments in Panama and worldwide reactions to the US military operations. Radio and television stations also carried statements by Cubans who said they were prepared to go to Panama to support the Panamanian forces. "The Cuban people are willing to give their blood for Panama," said writer Roberto Fernandez Retamar, because "it is not Panama that has been attacked, but our America and the Third World." * "The Canadian government regrets the use of force by the United States but understands and is sympathetic to the American action in the circumstances, particularly

given their concern over the escalating threats to American citizens in Panama," the Canadian Foreign Ministry said. The ministry added, "intervention by force is a dangerous precedent..." * Haiti announced its neutrality. The Organization of American States recognized Gen. Noriega's representative to the forum as the legitimate representative of Panama. * Nicaragua declared a state of alert and mobilized troops and tanks before dawn Wednesday, fearing that US troops that have invaded Panama would next head for Nicaragua. The US military intervention in Panama was a "hard blow to peace and the precarious stability in Central America," Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega said. * On Wednesday morning, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega sent messages to the leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement, the secretaries-general of the Organization of American States and the United Nations, and Pope John Paul II condemning the US military invasion of Panama. The message said, "This action represents not only a flagrant disrespect for the territorial integrity of a sovereign nation, but also a serious threat to the peace and security of Latin America, particularly to Central America." * The OAS scheduled another debate on Panama for Thursday after a Nicaraguan draft resolution criticizing the US invasion failed to obtain the support of two-thirds of the member nations to ensure a vote on the draft. A vote of 21 was necessary to treat the draft resolution as an urgent, and 18 supported the measure. During the debate, most OAS members criticized the use of force and deplored the violation of the principle of non-intervention. Several members also denounced the attitude of Gen. Noriega, saying he was the major obstacle to a peaceful settlement of the crisis in that country. * A statement by the Cuban Foreign Ministry condemned the US invasion, and asserted that the action "incites the condemnation and revulsion of all who respect peace, independence and liberty. "What Washington really aims to do is ignore commitments undertaken in the 1977 Torrijos-Carter treaties, which established the return in the year 2000 of the territory occupied by US military bases in the Canal Zone and the turning over of the Canal's management to Panama." * Uruguayan Foreign Minister Luis Barrios Tassano said that Uruguay "rejects" the US action, and demands immediate withdrawal of US troops from Panama. According to Xinhua, several Uruguayan political parties issued statements condemning the US invasion described as a violation of international law and a "crime" against the Panamanian people. * The French Foreign Ministry expressed regret over the use of force in Panama. The statement added that the French government supports the anti-drug campaign and the democratic process in Panama. * The government of Finland expressed regret over the military conflict in Panama, adding that international conflicts should be resolved instead through peaceful dialogue. * Spokesperson for the West German government, Dieter Vogel, expressed hopes that the military conflict would end quickly, and that the democratic process continue. * The Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement at the UN issued a statement on Wednesday evening condemning the US invasion, and calling for the immediate withdrawal of US troops from that country. Next, the statement expressed great concern over the negative consequences that "this intervention may have for peace and security in the region, and in particular, on the ongoing efforts to bring about political solutions" to conflicts in Central America. * In a communique released by the presidency's office, the Mexican government condemned the use of force as a means to resolve international conflicts, much less as a method of resolving the internal problems of a foreign country. Mexico requested the immediate termination of hostilities and "urgent consideration" of the situation by the UN and the OAS. The communique reiterated the Mexican position that the use of force against another nation is a violation of that country's sovereignty, and constitutes intervention. Since the beginning of the Panamanian crisis, said the communique, Mexico has supported a diplomatic solution in the context of the OAS. The Mexican government has publicly censured the conduct of Gen. Manuel Noriega, and the necessity of controlling the drug traffic. However, combatting

international infractions cannot be a justification for intervention in a sovereign nation, said the Panamanian people. * Nicaraguan Interior Minister Tomas Borge asserted that "it will be an act of cowardice if Latin American peoples remain with their arms folded in response to this crime of the US government." He continued: "If we accept this precedent, tomorrow the same could happen in Nicaragua or El Salvador." * The Brazilian government condemned the use of force in international relations, and described the US action as "regression in international relations." * Argentina's Justicialista Party demanded respect for the principle of self-determination, and condemned all methods implying force or violation of the principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other nations. * In a message to president of the UN Security Council Enrique Penalosa, US Ambassador to the UN Thomas Pickering said Washington employed necessary force to guarantee the lives of US citizens in Panama, and the integrity of the Canal treaties. * On Wednesday night in Buenos Aires, Radical Party Deputy Federico Storani said, "No nation, no matter how strong, has the right to resolve the fate of another by military means, simply because it believes its interests are affected. Radical Senator Ricardo Laferriere said it would be hard to find a regime as despicable as Noriega's, but for Latin Americans foreign military intervention was "even more repugnant than any dictatorship." The national committees of Argentina's two most important parties, the Justicialistas and the Radical Civic Union, issued statements condemning the US action. * The Argentine Foreign Ministry issued a communique calling for the immediate withdrawal of US troops, and expressed great concern over developments in Panama. The communique added that the continuity of Noriega in power in Panama was an insurmountable obstacle to restoring democracy in that country. * Rep. Don Edwards (D-Calif.) called the invasion "a trigger-happy act of gunboat diplomacy" which violates the US constitution. Dec. 21: The UN Security Council continued informal consultations to decide whether to call a formal meeting to discuss the US intervention in Panama. According to Notimex, one of the factors causing the delay is debate of the same question by the Organization of American States. Traditionally, the UN has avoided debate of a given topic a regional organization is in session on the same issue. * On Thursday, the draft introduced by Nicaragua at the OAS was revised to include condemnations of Noriega. The revised draft was reportedly supported by Mexico and a majority of Latin American and Caribbean representatives. Colombia's OAS representative Julio Londono said, "No country in Latin America can remain impassive to a military invasion against another Latin American country. But that does not imply that we support General Noriega." * The Uruguayan government has refused to recognize Guillermo Endara's administration. Officials said Montevideo would not recognize the US-installed government. * Brazilian president-elect Fernando Collor de Mello said, "No one has the right to intervene or interfere in the domestic politics of other nations." * Late Thursday, the 15-member Security Council debated the Panama invasion, with many governments denouncing the United States. The council could not decide which government to recognize the one which has been ousted, or the one installed by the US. No further meeting was scheduled. On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Yugoslav ambassador to the UN, Dragoslav Pejic, told the UN Security Council: "The Non-Aligned countries have always considered unacceptable any foreign, especially military, intervention under whatever pretext, since it represents a gross violation of sovereignty." Movement nations called on the Council to insist on the immediate cessation of US military action and unconditional withdrawal of US troops from Panama. * Eduardo Vallarino, a self-exiled Panamanian businessman, was nominated as Panama's UN ambassador by Endara. Vallarino told a news conference that Panama's Constitution prohibits extradition. If Noriega is captured by occupying US forces, he said, Panama would protest his extradition to face narcotics charges in the

US. * Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, in his first comment on the US intervention, said: "The position of the UN for the last 45 years is that we always regret the use of force." He added that he hoped the Security Council would reach agreement "to restore order in Panama." * Peruvian President Alan Garcia repeated a proposal to postpone the Feb. 15 drug summit with President Bush and the presidents of three Andean nations in Colombia, saying "I cannot meet with the leader of an invading nation." Hundreds of protesters chanting anti-US slogans marched in downtown Lima Thursday night and burned a US flag near that country's embassy to protest the invasion. * In Bogota, police used teargas to break up a demonstration of Colombians protesting the US invasion. * The Colombian Foreign Ministry said the government had not yet considered extending recognition to Endara and his vice presidents. Bogota's position is that the new government in Panama must emerge from "legitimate popular support, not from the force of arms." The ministry communique called for the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Panama. The ministry announced that representatives from Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Uruguay, Colombia and Venezuela will meet in Washington on Saturday to study possible solutions for the crisis. Rio Group members planned to meet in Bogota on Wednesday night, but postponed the meeting because of a conflict with the meeting by the Organization of the American States in Washington. * Cuban television carried repeated broadcasts of demonstrations and protestors saying there were prepared to go to Panama to fight. Protestors demonstrated outside the US Interests Section waving Cuban and Panamanian flags and chanting anti-US slogans demanding that Washington pull its troops out of Panama. Various professional organizations issued statements opposing the invasion. The Cuban Committee for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, which has received US support, also condemned the invasion. A Communist Party Central Committee meeting adjourned early to allow members to return their jobs "in the leading levels of the party and the government," officials said. The Armed Forces Ministry suspended a planned military inspection. * Late Thursday, the Pakistani government issued a statement expressing "concern" over the situation in Panama, and called for resolution of the problem in accordance with the wishes of the Panamanian people. The statement said Pakistan has always supported the principle of "non-intervention and non-use of force in inter-state relations." * According to a report by AFP, in Mexico City, some 3,000 demonstrators surrounded the US Embassy to protest the invasion of Panama, shouting "assassins, assassins" and threw stones, bottles, paint and rubbish. Witnesses said three window panes were broken. * Some 2,000 Argentines demonstrated in front of the congressional building to demand that their government break diplomatic relations with the US. * In Brasilia, 13 congresspersons from several parties delivered a note of repudiation to the US Embassy. The note said that US aggression in Panama offended the dignity of all Latin Americans. They called on the Brazilian government, which has condemned the US action, to maintain coherence and thus refuse to recognize the government of Guillermo Endara. The note said, "Independently of ethical judgments on the behavior of government officials, it is unacceptable that the US government, with its long interventionist tradition, attributes to itself the right to police the world...ignoring the sovereignty of nations." * The Salvadoran government expressed its support for the US action because "General Noriega represents a threat to democracy in Central America." President Alfredo Cristiani asserted that Noriega had acted to destabilize "the democratic governments of the region." * Honduran Foreign Minister Carlos Lopez Contreras said his government had reservations about recognizing Endara's government, "as long as one cannot really know if he has the support of the Panamanian people." * In Caracas, about 100 demonstrators marched through the streets and plazas exhorting Venezuelans to defend Panama's sovereignty. Waving Panamanian flags, the demonstrators initiated a register of persons willing to join Latin American Dignity Battalions to defend Panamanian sovereignty.

* At a press conference, Argentine President Carlos Menem asserted that the his government's position on the US invasion of Panama will not "modify" trade relations with the US. Dec. 22: The Peruvian government suspended anti-drug operations with US agents in the Huallaga Valley. Peruvian Foreign Minister Guillermo Larco Cox said Peru was opening its embassy in Panama City to people seeking political asylum. * Honduran President Jose Azcona said that in no way does his government justify the US intervention in Panama. He said, "The big loser in the intervention is the United States which has become an army of occupation...The North Americans have violated Panama's sovereignty." Endara, said the president, is going to experience great difficulty because he took power via foreign intervention. * According to a report by CNN, Noriega was captured by US troops in Panama Friday. The Pentagon, however, said it had no information on the matter. * On Friday morning, the Organization of American States approved a resolution by 20 to 1, with the US voting against it and six members abstaining. The resolution "deeply deplored" the invasion, and called for withdrawal of US forces. * Bush administration sources said 120 Panamanian soldiers and 220 Panamanian civilians had been killed thus far. US casualties, according to a report by DPA, included 20 soldiers dead and two missing, two US civilians dead, and 202 US soldiers wounded. * In Caracas, President Carlos Andres Perez said that the government of Guillermo Endara "is not legitimate." He said that his administration must be "transitory," until a constitutional assembly "selects a new government" and calls elections. Perez justified his statements on Tuesday regarding eventual recognition of Endara's government on grounds that Panama cannot remain without a government. He asserted that Endara's rule must be temporary because it was commenced under the "stigma" of invasion. The president described Endara as a "victim" of circumstances. He added that the invasion should never have happened, and there is no way to justify it. "However, it is a reality and now we must seek a solution to the Latin American crisis." (Basic data from several reports by AP, AFP, DPA, Notimex, Xinhua, 12/20-22/89)

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