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Reports On Human & Material Costs Of U.S. Invasion Of Panama: A Summary

by Deborah Tyroler

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Dec. 23: The Pentagon reported that 25 US soldiers and 139 Panamanian soldiers were killed; 241 US soldiers, and 95 Panamanian soldiers wounded; four US soldiers missing; two US dependents killed; and, 1,663 Panamanian troops detained. At this time, no official count of casualties among Panamanian civilians was available. Dr. Elmer Miranda, deputy director of Santo Tomas Hospital, was cited by AP as saying that the hospital morgue held 200 bodies. He added that a colleague said there were 60 more in the US Southern Command's Gorgas Hospital. Dec. 24: Notimex reported that at least 1,500 Panamanians had died in the fighting. Some unofficial sources claimed that around 2,000 civilians may have been killed in the aerial bombings of densely populated neighborhoods and in other military actions since Wednesday morning. Dec. 25: AP pointed out that the US tank and rocket-firing helicopter barrage against the military headquarters before dawn Wednesday sparked fires that destroyed housing in the Chorrillo barrio, creating at least 20,000 refugees. Dec. 26: AP reported that 23 US soldiers and 297 pro-Noriega forces were killed in the fighting, and "an undetermined number of civilians also died in the battle." Next, AP said that at least 12,000 have been left homeless. Dec. 27: Dozens of owners of retail stores, victims of quite thorough looting after the Dec. 20 invasion was underway, were told by insurance companies that "acts of war" were not covered in their policies. Conservative estimates by insurance brokers and store owners put the damage and losses between \$750 million and \$1 billion, according to Alfredo Maduro, president of the Panamanian Chamber of Commerce. Maduro said Panamanian businesspersons will request the US for direct assistance to try to recover losses and resume operations. Businesspersons have estimated that more than 90% of the shops were looted on Via Espana and Central Avenue, main commercial streets in downtown Panama City. Thousands of looters raided everything from food, furniture, televisions and appliances. Only bookstores emerged relatively unscathed. Looting damage in El Dorado, a shopping center for upper middle class neighborhoods, was estimated at \$25 million. Dec. 30: AP correspondent Candace Hughes noted that on Dec. 20-22 looters gutted shops and stores in Colon, as well as port area warehouses and the dockside terminal where goods from the Colon Free Zone, the world's second-largest duty free port, are stored. Crucial government offices such as customs houses were destroyed, and the port closed. The US Southern Command's official casualty toll stands at 23 US troops and 313 Panamanian soldiers dead. According to a report by NicaNet, the latest official civilian casualty count of the newly installed government in Panama included 400 dead and 2,000 wounded. The report cited Spanish news service EFE as saying that unofficial Panamanian sources estimate the civilian death toll at between 3,600 and 5,000. Citing unidentified Panamanian sources, Xinhua reported that losses incurred in the Colon free trade zone resulting from the invasion are estimated at \$4 million. Jan. 2: AFP reported that in addition "to severe economic disruption caused by the US [economic] sanctions," Panama sustained heavy damages during the US invasion. US military estimates put the damage at about \$600 million. AFP said that Panamanian officials have claimed the damages could surpass \$2 billion. Also reported by AFP, about 10,000 people were abruptly unemployed by the invasion due to fighting which destroyed 75% of the commercial sector in Panama City. Jan. 3: Notimex reported

that clean-up operations by US troops in the Chorrillo suburb, destroyed during bombing attacks on Dec. 20, were uncovering remains of many Panamanians who apparently did not heed orders to evacuate. About 20,000 residents of the barrio have been promised new homes by the US. They are currently residing in the National Park and the Balboa school, where they receive assistance from the US. Jan. 5: NicaNet cited unconfirmed reports by unidentified Panamanian sources as saying that over 3,000 Panamanian civilians had been killed or wounded. The US-based Human Rights Watch put the preliminary tally at over 1,000. NicaNet also cited Jesse Jackson who said there were thousands killed in Panama City alone, not including other deaths in the countryside. Jackson said, "We bombed a civilian population at night in a densely populated area of poor people...It appears that there were more civilians killed in Panama City than in Tiananmen Square." The NicaNet report also cited estimates prepared by the Panamanian Political Organization (New York): 2,000 Panamanians dead; 15,000 homeless; 7,000 detained; and, 600 missing. The organization put material damage caused by the invasion at \$2 billion, in addition to \$3 billion in losses incurred after two years of US economic sanctions. Jan. 6: AFP reported that a Panamanian mission visiting Washington at the end of December estimated that several billion dollars would be required for Panama's economic reconstruction. Jan. 9: The Pentagon reported that some 220 civilians died during the US invasion of Panama, and an undetermined number were injured. Defense Department spokesperson Bob Hall said estimates from the Panamanian medical community were lower, at 203 deaths. Hall said that among the dead were members of the defunct Panama Defense Forces (PDF), the Dignity Battalions and looters. Former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark had charged that the White House was engaged in a "conspiracy of silence" about the casualty figure and put the number in the thousands. [Basic data from AFP, 12/30/89, 01/02/90, 01/06/90, 01/07/90, 01/09/90; AP, 12/23-25/89, 12/30/89; Notimex, 12/24/89, 01/03/90; Xinhua, 12/30/89; 12/30/89, 01/05/90 reports by Nicaragua Network (Washington, DC)]

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