

ORDERED BY BUSH

Alternative Government Sworn — Recognized by Washington

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Wednesday, Dec. 20 — The White house announced early this morning that it had ordered American military forces into the streets of Panama in a major operation designed to topple the Government of the Panamanian strongman, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega.

The White House spokesman, Marlin Fitzwater, briefing reporters at 1:40 A.M., said that an alternative Panamanian Government had been sworn in and immediately recognized by the United States. The Government is headed by Guillermo Endara, who will serve as President with two Vice Presidents, Guillermo Ford and Ricardo Arias Calderón. They were elected earlier this year in voting that was later annulled by General Noriega. Mr. Fitzwater refused to say where the three men were in Panama.

Mr. Fitzwater said that the military operation, which began shortly after 1 A.M., was designed to restore democracy to Panama, to protect American lives and to capture General Noriega and bring him to the United States for prosecution on drug-trafficking charges.

Noriega Not Yet in Custody

He said General Noriega had not yet been captured.

[United States soldiers surrounding the main Panamanian military installations yelled over megaphones for the Panamanian troops to surrender, The Associated Press quoted residents living near the military posts as saying. The Panamanian Government radio station said the headquarters had been "cruelly bombarded."]

Mr. Fitzwater declined to provide details of the operation or to say whether any Panmanian forces had joined with the Americans or how much resistance Americans were facing in the first stages of the operation. He called it "a major undertaking," and said the United States was confident that it would succeed.

Decision by President

Mr. Fitzwater said President Bush made an initial decision to use force on Sunday, after the killing of an American Marine by Panamanian soldiers.

The press secretary said the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaties was at risk with General Noriega in power. He said that President Bush had made every effort to resolve the situation peacefully, but that American lives were now at risk.

Reports from Panama said that American troops and tanks were moving on General Noriega's headquarters, with mortar and machine-gun fire echoing through the city. American citizens were told by the United States Southern Command in Panama to stay off the streets.

Mr. Fitzwater said Mr. Bush was monitoring the progress of the opera-

Continued on Page A8, Column 3



Reuters

American military forces were ordered into action in Panama by President Bush early today. Before the White House acted, a United States armored vehicle patrolled in the canal zone, about nine miles from the Panamanian capital.

U.S. Troops Battle to Topple Noriega

Continued From Page A1

tion in the White House with senior aides, including the White house chief of staff, John H. Sununu, and the national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft.

He said Mr. Bush, Vice President Dan Quayle, and Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d were telephoning leaders in Latin American West European countries to inform them of the action.

Administration officials said the military action was code-named Operation Echo. The United States maintains 12,000 troops, most combat forces, in Panama, and additional units were flown into the country on Tuesday to assist in the operation.

The operation was the most dramatic foreign policy move of the Bush Administration and the first time that United States military forces have been sent into combat since the air strike against the Libyan leader, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, in April 1986. The last large-scale engagement by American ground forces took place during the invasion of Grenada in October 1983.

Since taking office, Mr. Bush has been frustrated by failed efforts to encourage the ouster of General Noriega, who is accused by the Administration of being a major sponsor of illicit drug trafficking. The White House was criticized in October for failing to take steps to support an effort by elements of the Panama Defense Forces to remove General Noriega.

It was not clear whether the White House consulted with Congressional leaders about the military action, or notified them in advance. Thomas S. Foley, the Speaker of the House, said on Tuesday night that he had not been alerted by the Administration.

The first indications that military action was imminent came during the day Tuesday when Washington added to its forces in Panama, flying troops and equipment into American military bases.

American troop transport planes, apparently carrying members of the 82d Airborne Division from Fort Bragg, N.C., landed in Panama. The exact number of arriving troops was not known.

In a chilling first-hand account from the Marriott Hotel in the center of Panama City, an American businessman, talking by telephone with NBC-TV News in New York, said Panamanian troops or militiamen had entered the hotel and had ordered some people from their rooms.

The businessman, who identified himself only by his first name, Roger, said the armed men were dressed in fatigues and plain clothes.

"They are dragging Americans from their rooms," he said. "I heard some screaming and some gunfire. Then everything was quiet for a while."

He said that from his window in the hotel he could see "buildings burning. This is absolutely crazy," he said.

"Right now I can see various military equipment out in the street," he reported. "Now and then, you might see a tank and troops running in different directions. I don't think they are American troops. They appear to be Panamanian. I don't know in which direction they are shooting. The gunfire comes in bursts."

He continued: "We have some people knocking on the door saying they want to take all Americans out of their rooms and take them to the upper floors. I plan to be leaving here shortly, but I don't know where I am going. It sounds like there is too much commotion out in the hall. I'm getting ready to take cover here in the room now."

"Hold on, there is something going on down the hallway."

At this point, the conversation came to an end.

Administration officials refused on Tuesday to discuss the deployment of troops but hinted to reporters that some kind of military action was imminent by suggesting that they be prepared for further developments during the night. Officially, the Pentagon confirmed only that the 82d Airborne was conducting maneuvers, and officials suggested indirectly that they were related to the situation in Panama.

On Tuesday, President Bush presented a business-as-usual image, joining singers in Christmas carols at a holiday party at the White House.

Brent Scowcroft, the President's national security adviser, slipped away from the party and joined his deputy, Robert M. Gates, in Mr. Scowcroft's White House office late at night.

There also were late-night meetings in the Pentagon.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Bush met in the Oval Office with top advisers, including Defense Secretary Dick Cheney; Gen. Colin L. Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Attorney General Dick Thornburgh and Vice President Dan Quayle. The White House described the meeting as a discussion of a wider role for the military in combating drug trafficking. The meeting lasted about half an hour longer than scheduled, an Administration official said.

Earlier this year, after tensions between the United States and Panama flared, President Bush dispatched reinforcements to Panama to augment the

An alternative Panamanian Government is sworn in.

12,000 American troops stationed there. No military action was taken at the time.

The latest troop movement came as the Administration described the situation in Panama as deteriorating, and members of Congress urged the Government to respond with caution to the killing of an American Marine lieutenant.

The State Department spokeswoman, Margaret D. Tutwiler, said the United States was taking General Noriega's declaration of war last week more seriously after the killing on Saturday night of the lieutenant and the wounding of another officer at a roadblock.

"Noriega's irresponsible declaration of a state of war last week, followed only hours later by indiscriminate and unprovoked violence against Americans clearly increases tension in Panama," Miss Tutwiler said. "We find the unwarranted use of violence against Americans by the Noriega regime unacceptable."

Security in front of the Panamanian military headquarters appeared lighter than in recent days. A military vehicle on which a machine gun was mounted was pulled back this evening. But nearby streets remained barricaded, and soldiers were stationed along key roads behind sandbags and stacks of tires.

Some Urge Caution

Mr. Williams said Tuesday that elements of the Army's 18th Airborne Corps were conducting emergency deployment readiness exercises.

The 18th Airborne is the Army's fast-reaction force and includes paratroopers of the 82d Airborne Division.

In May, President Bush ordered about 1,800 soldiers and marines sent to Panama to reinforce 10,300 American troops already there and to protect American lives.

The United States has also been conducting military exercises in Panama this year that American officials say have been held to exercise Washington's rights to defend the canal under the 1979 Panama Canal Treaties, but which some observers say are also intended to put psychological pressure on General Noriega.

The exercises include motorized patrols across the Bridge of the Americas near Panama City, amphibious operations across the canal near the Pacific Ocean entrance to the canal and flying troop reinforcements into Howard Air Force Base.

Following the deployment of troops and the exercises, incidents of harassment against American servicemen dropped significantly.

On Capitol Hill, some lawmakers urged President Bush to use caution in his response to the shooting death of the marine officer, while others emphasized the need for the President to send an unambiguous message to Gen-

eral Noriega that a pattern of aggression against the United States would not be tolerated.

Senator Christopher J. Dodd, a Connecticut Democrat who is the chairman of the Western Hemisphere subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said on the NBC News program "Today" that he hoped President Bush would not act abruptly because of criticism in October for failing to intervene during an abortive coup attempt in Panama. "My concern would be that some of the political advisers around him are reminding him of those headlines and may cause him to act precipitously here," Senator Dodd said.

Senator Richard G. Lugar of Indiana, a senior Republican member of the Foreign Relations Committee, said that caution was important, but added in a statement: "We need to avoid the appearance of acquiescence that might embolden Noriega and lead to future American and Panamanian casualties. There are measured options, military and otherwise, that would inconvenience Noriega and they ought to be considered promptly in the wake of unacceptable activities of the Panamanian Defense Forces."

The Pentagon identified the marine who was killed as First Lieut. Robert Paz, 25 years old, of Dallas.

The White House said the killing of the American officer, the first by Panamanian forces, was part of a coordinated campaign that began when the National Assembly of Representatives declared the country at war with the United States. His shooting death was one of several incidents of harassment of American servicemen last weekend.

In one incident Saturday night, according to Pentagon officials, an American officer and his wife were arrested by Panama's military. The officials said that in four hours of interrogation, the naval officer was beaten and repeatedly kicked in the head and groin and threatened with death as loaded pistols were pointed at his head. His wife, the officials added, was slammed against a wall, sexually threatened and required to stand with her arms over her head until she collapsed.

In another incident over the weekend, a Panamanian soldier loaded his assault rifle and pointed it at the stomach of an American military policeman who was on patrol.

The Pentagon said that a United States Army lieutenant who wounded a Panamanian traffic officer Monday was apparently not authorized to carry a sidearm, was in civilian clothes at the time of the shooting, and that the incident was under investigation.