

# Noriega still in control after attempted coup

By Rafael Candanedo  
Associated Press

PANAMA CITY, Panama (AP) — Troops loyal to Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega put down an attempted coup by a small rebel force Tuesday, retaking the headquarters of the Panamanian Defense Forces after a six-hour gunfight. About 65 rebels were reported detained.

"This incident corresponds to the permanent aggression of U.S. forces against the tranquility of our country. The proof is that U.S. forces closed access routes to the barracks," Noriega said in a television statement from Defense Forces headquarters after the fighting sputtered to an end.

Noriega later stepped out of his headquarters with several fellow officers and waved to reporters but made no statement.

The rebels "surrendered to General Noriega in person," said Defense Forces spokesman Maj. Edgardo Lopez. He said "more than 60" rebel troopers and four or five officers had been detained. The Defense Forces serves as both the military and police and has a total strength of about 15,000 members.

Rebel troops seized the headquarters in an attack launched around 7 a.m. but failed to capture Noriega. Troops loyal to the general, who commands the Defense Forces and controls

the government, launched a counterattack, and by 1 p.m. the shooting had tapered off as Noriega's backers gained the upper hand. Noriega appeared on television around 4 p.m.

The United States, which has been trying to oust Noriega since he was indicted nearly two years ago in Florida on drug charges, denied any involvement in the coup attempt. The uprising was launched by junior Defense Forces officers.

U.S. troops assigned to the Panama Canal Zone took up positions about 600 yards from the headquarters, placed between the fighting at the compound and U.S. installations at Fort Amador and Quarry Heights. However, a spokesman for the U.S. Southern Command said the American troops took no part in the fighting and were dispatched for security reasons.

It was the second time in 18 months that Noriega had survived a coup attempt by his own officers.

In a radio broadcast after the rebels seized the headquarters the insurgents claimed Noriega had been ousted, but loyal forces soon took control of the broadcast networks.

"We want to underline that the situation in the country has been duly controlled to guarantee the peace and tranquillity that the state should assure for its citizens," said a statement released by Justice and Interior

Minister Olmedo Miranda.

It declared an 8 p.m.-to-5 a.m. curfew and said the news media could report only official statements on the revolt.

Guillermo Ford, an opposition candidate for vice president in the May 7 election, was interviewed in New York on *CBS Evening News* and asked about the foiled coup.

"I think Noriega's going to get stronger regarding the Panamanian people," Ford said. "He's been holding them hostage for the last two years."

International observers at the May 7 balloting said the opposition slate won by a substantial margin but the Noriega-controlled government annulled the election.

Panama's provisional president, Francisco Rodriguez, speaking to the U.N. General Assembly in New York, said the attempted coup against his government had been crushed.

Rodriguez, in his midafternoon address, did not accuse the United States of complicity in the revolt but said Washington had undermined his nation with "financial terrorism, economic blackmail and political interference."

A small group of Defense Forces had tried to overthrow Noriega in March 1988, but that attempt also was crushed quickly by forces loyal to the general.

The United States has been

been applying pressure on Panama, including economic sanctions, in an effort to force Noriega to step down.

The rebels' claimed in a broadcast around noon that they had overthrown Noriega and retired top officers, but that communique was not repeated.

An officer loyal to Noriega later said the general was at an undisclosed location controlling the operations against the insurgents.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said Tuesday afternoon in Washington that officials had heard early "rumblings" of the uprising. He said later it appeared that Noriega's

forces "are back in control."

A communique by loyalists, read over Channel 2 television, said, "The nationalist officers of all ranks and in all the barracks countrywide have confirmed their loyalty to the fatherland ... and to our Commander-in-Chief Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega."

Noriega inherited command of the military from Gen. Omar Torrijos, who seized power in 1968 and was killed in a plane crash in 1981.

Noriega claims the U.S. charges of drug trafficking and money laundering are part of a U.S. plot to abrogate the Panama Canal treaties of 1977.

## Boren criticizes U.S. for not aiding rebels

By Jim Drinkard  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman David Boren sharply criticized the Bush administration Tuesday for failing to send in U.S. troops to help rebels seeking to overthrow Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega.

"Here you have brave people in Panama ... trying to rid themselves of a drug dealer and a thug who's taken over their country," said Boren, D-Okla., speaking after an hour-long classified briefing from CIA officials.

"And for the United States, with all of our strength and force and all of our belief in democracy, to stand by 'two miles away as the crow flies' and do nothing, and allow these people to fail, personally I think is wrong."

Boren said he had been notified early Tuesday that the coup was in progress and had followed its progress throughout the day. He said about 200 to 300 rebel troops had seized the Panamanian Defense Forces

headquarters compound with Noriega inside, and had the leader "trapped and pinned down."

But later in the day some 500 troops loyal to Noriega surrounded the compound and freed the dictator, he said. The fate of those who led the revolt is unclear, he said.

No American troops or citizens were present or involved in any of the events surrounding the coup attempt, he added.

"I'm just sorry it didn't succeed. I'm sorry there was not some way, apparently, for the United States to help make it succeed," Boren told reporters.

He cited failures by the Reagan administration to use force to help deposed former President Eric Arturo Delvalle when he sought to dismiss Noriega, and to help maintain order when Noriega overrode national elections to retain power for himself.

Asked whether military force should have been used on Tuesday, Boren said: "My personal view is that we should have, and we didn't. ... We certainly knew at that moment where he was. He was in a physical location where perhaps he could have been served with that warrant for his arrest" stemming from a U.S. drug indictment.

"I think it's one thing for the United States to go into any other country, particularly in our hemisphere, and try to impose its will from the outside," Boren said.

"It's quite another thing when the people of Panama have very clearly spoken in their free elections, and overwhelmingly want to rid themselves of this ... corrupt dictatorship."

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