

U.S. Plans New Effort to Oust Noriega: 'If there is loss of life, that's not constrained.'

By MICHAEL WINES special to The New York Times

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 16 — The Bush Administration, with the approval of Congressional oversight panels, is planning another attempt to unseat Panama's leader, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, Administration officials said today.

The Central Intelligence Agency operation is the first to proceed under a recent agreement between the White House and the Congress that permits American participation in secret operations that might lead to violence or to the death of foreign leaders, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"This is obviously not a plan to assassinate Noriega," a Government official said today. "But if there is loss of life, that's not constrained."

American officials, confirming a report today in *The Los Angeles Times*, said the new operation, called Panama 5, had been given a \$3 million budget. Like some previous efforts, it would recruit disgruntled members of the general's Government to take part in an attempt to force him out of office.

Bush Declines to Comment

While officially classified, American proposals to oust General Noriega have become public with clockwork regularity. Plans for the latest operation were submitted to the Congressional Intelligence Committees for re-

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view only some three weeks ago and were approved essentially without change, officials said.

President Bush declined to comment on the report. "It wouldn't be covert if I even referred to it," he said, "so there will be no such discussion of anything, which means I am not confirming nor denying." The President made the remarks at Andrews Air Force Base in suburban Washington, where he was boarding Air Force One to fly to Houston for the funeral of a friend.

Officials said the operation reflects a toughened United States policy toward Panama that not only rules out any deal with General Noriega to obtain his resignation, but actively seeks the aid of Panama's military and exiled Government officials in plans for his overthrow.

Under President Ronald Reagan, the White House had implied that it would not seek to bring General Noriega to the United States, where he faces two indictments on narcotics charges, if he agreed to resign. General Noriega was indicted last year on drug trafficking

charges handed up by Federal grand juries in Miami and in Tampa, Fla.

The report in *The Los Angeles Times* said a senior Administration official had implied that American troops would be allowed to take part in the operation. That assertion could not be independently confirmed today.

Brief Help for Noriega Foes

American military forces in Panama briefly aided opponents of General Noriega during a coup attempt last month by blocking a road that rescuers could have taken to reach the general at his military headquarters.

That coup, which ended in the execution of its leaders, was not otherwise supported by the American Government. Its collapse on Oct. 3 — after General Noriega's opponents apparently held him at gunpoint but decided not to shoot him — led the White House and Congress to question whether the C.I.A. should become more involved in such operations.

The C.I.A. is bound by a 1976 law banning its involvement in assassination plots. A Presidential order implementing the law had been viewed as barring any role in operations that could turn violent, whether or not assassination was contemplated.

The United States had supported four efforts by Panama's military, by exiles and by internal political foes to force General Noriega from power, but all were unsuccessful.

Last month, William H. Webster, the Director of Central Intelligence, urged that the assassination ban be eased to permit the C.I.A. to assist some operations with a potential for violence. That view was formally adopted this month in a memorandum agreed to by the White House and the House and Senate Intelligence Committees.

The Administration has refused to make public the classified agreement, and White House officials have repeatedly said that the legal orders implementing the 1976 assassination ban remain unchanged. But officials have acknowledged that the memorandum gives the Administration much more latitude.