

What Can We Expect on Election Day from the Forces of Tyranny?



by Tom DeWeese

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There is growing concern over possible violence if Trump wins the election. What will happen the day after election day? While I obviously can't know for sure, I can tell you from personal experience what can happen when an entrenched tyranny refuses to concede after a sound defeat.

In May, 1989, I helped sponsor the only privately-funded election observation team for the Panamanian presidential election. Dictator Manual Noriega was running for re-election. My team was there to watch for and report any voter irregularities. In other words, keep the vote as honest as possible.

Noriega did all he could to control who came into the country to observe the election, allowing the availability of only one embassy in Florida from which to apply for visas. One woman, under strict orders, was given the task of approving who could obtain permission to enter the country. Even the White House was unable to gain the document. But I did.

I sent one of my team to that Florida embassy. As he entered, there was a horde of news media and others demanding visas to cover the election. The lady in charge was trying to explain the restrictions as she was systematically turning them down.

My team member stood quietly and waited. Finally, she turned to him as he said, in Spanish, it looks like you are having a very bad day and he smiled sympathetically. Those were the first kind words she had heard in weeks. She replied that she was not feeling well but had a job to do. Then she asked why he was there, and he replied, "I need visas." Unexpectedly, she invited him into the conference room. They talked for a few minutes, and she said, "I'm going to grant you the visas." Shocked – we were on our way. The White House even called one day and asked how we did it.

Now, we were in Panama, a nation that was suffering under one of the worst dictators in South or Central America. Soldiers were stationed on nearly every street corner. Everything was under strict surveillance, from the actions of local citizens to communications with the U.S. military base. I know this because one of my team members was a staffer for a U.S. Senator. On our first night in the country, we were invited to a reception at the home of the head of the Panama City Chamber of Commerce. While there, the Senate staffer wanted to find out if his boss had arrived. He was coming to the country through the U.S. military base. So, he called it from the home phone of our host. Suddenly the host asked who he called and was horrified to learn it was the base. Hang up, hang up, he pleaded. One week after we were gone, soldiers arrived and arrested the head of the Chamber of Commerce. That's what happens when you live under tyranny.

Now to the election. First, the rules. On election day, everyone was restricted from traveling outside of their precinct and stay in your area until the polls closed. Second, every candidate for each office being voted on had their own ballot. As you entered the voting booth you selected the ballots of the candidates you supported and put them in an envelope then drop it in the ballot box.

Now, with everything in place, my team was provided with a local driver to take us around the city and inspect voting

areas, to look for any irregularities. It didn't take long to find them. First, it should be noted that most Panamanian voting sites were outside. That's normal for an area in the warm tropics. Most of the voting sites were in schools and they were also outside classrooms.

The initial thing we noticed were huge gatherings of people standing around the voting site. We quickly learned why. Noriega had figured out quickly how to control the vote – don't deliver the opposition ballots. Second, since citizens can't leave their precincts on election day, so authorities simply put citizens' names on voter rolls in a different precinct across town, so they can't get there to vote.

These are the problems we began to run into as we traveled through Panama City. Citizens, noticing our Election Observer badges began to confront us with such problems.

As we traveled from precinct to precinct we came in contact with the opposition candidates. These included MOLIRENA Party Presidential candidate Guillermo Endara and his Vice-Presidential running mate, Guillermo Ford. They were desperately rushing to every polling place to plead with citizens to stay in line and not leave. It was an incredible sight to witness candidate Endara arrive. He would simply put his hands in the air and the huge crowd of hundreds would immediately rush to him, cheering. He would shout to the crowd, "We are working to get the ballots to you." Then on to the next. At one such stop I was standing right in front of him as he was almost crushed by the enthusiastic crowd. Our eyes met as he just shook his head.

During a couple of breaks in our hotel lobby, we encountered a CBS News team covering the events. We talked with them, and finally, I said to the head of the news team, "you are seeing the exact same vote fraud we are witnessing. Why is this not being reported on the news?" His frustrated response was, "news editors in New York." Yep, that explained it all.

Meanwhile, as we passed public televisions in hotel lobbies, nearly every set was tuned to CNN, showing Former President and self-proclaimed “election expert” Jimmy Carter reporting that everything was going just fine.

At one of the main polling places in town, which just happened to be the home area for both Noriega and opposition candidate Endara, I stood on a platform, observing the now familiar scene of frustrated voters standing in line, waiting for ballots. Meanwhile, buses began to arrive, delivering what were called Noriega’s “Dignity Battalions.” They began to surround the citizens. Then, almost like someone had set off a started pistol, they instantly began to chant and then attack the voters. Yet the people stood their ground and refused to leave.

Just before the polls were to close, a report of ballot fraud came in from a voting place located outside the city. We saw Jimmy Carter rush to his limo and head out there. Later, when I addressed the CPAC conference about this whole experience, I was asked how bad the election fraud was. My answer was, “It was so bad that eventually EVEN Jimmy Carter could see it.”

However, even after the polls closed, dictator Noriega wasn’t done. The MOLIRENA Party planned a news conference at its headquarters. As we drove up to the building to attend, we saw some people standing outside looking frustrated. They told us that all the power in that end of town had been cut off. So, the news conference was to be held at a hotel on the other side of town.

Upon arriving at the hotel, we found that the event would be held in the open rooftop event space above the hotel. I found it a little scary to see that the only way up or down was a very narrow staircase or an elevator that would hold only two or three people. As we entered the meeting space, there was everyone Noriega would like to remove from his country – the opposition candidates, news media, and the election observers.

As I sat through what seemed like the longest news conference in memory, I kept thinking, all he had to do was send a helicopter armed with a machine gun and eliminate all of his problems. He didn't act that night, but the next day was another story.

As I was preparing to fly back to Washington, DC, a couple members of my team decided to stay another day. There was to be a demonstration sponsored by the MOLIRENA Party and others to protest the fraudulent election. Thousands gathered to march. Local citizens saw my team and insisted they come in off the streets NOW! And then they saw why. On came the Dignity Battalions of Noriega thugs.

Opposition Vice Presidential candidate Guillermo Ford was personally attacked. His bodyguard was killed, and Ford was stabbed and beaten, along with hundreds of others, by the Dignity Battalions.

Meanwhile, I was at the airport where I saw the latest addition of the government newspaper offering the headline, "Noriega Wins by 55%." The counting of the votes had stopped as Endara and Ford were leading by a three-to-one margin.

Will history repeat itself on November 5th? Are the Harris Dignity Battalions preparing to maintain their status quo? We must stand strong like the Panamanian people and refuse to leave, even if our polling place is threatened. We need poll watchers to oversee all aspects of the vote counting process. And we need to stay at the polling site all night, if necessary, to make sure surprise boxes of ballots don't just suddenly appear without verification. Tyranny hates a bright spotlight. Freedom shines bright!

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E-Mail Tom DeWeese: contact@americanpolicy.org