



France readies to extradite ex-dictator Noriega to Panama after US gives 'consent'

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PARIS — France is ready to extradite former Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega to his home country after the United States gave its “consent,” the French government said Monday.

Panama has requested Noriega’s extradition for his role in the killing of the leader of an attempted military coup in 1989. He also face charges of murdering political opponents.

We are now “readying to take the extradition decree,” French Foreign Ministry spokesman Bernard Valero said.

Noriega — military dictator in Panama from 1983 to 1989 — was imprisoned in the U.S. for two decades after being deposed in a 1989 U.S. invasion. France needed U.S. approval to extradite him.

He was sent from Florida to France last year to face money laundering charges, where he was sentenced to seven years in prison.

But Panama also wants him prosecuted for graver crimes, including the murder of political opponents.

Panama’s Foreign Relations Department said in a statement Sunday that it was waiting for the French government to officially inform it of its decision to extradite Noriega. The U.S. sent Panama a diplomatic note dated June 16 saying it had given France its green light for Noriega to be extradited.

U.S. Justice Department spokeswoman Laura Sweeney declined to comment when asked about the Noriega matter, while Noriega’s French lawyer Yves Leberquier said the former leader had not yet been notified of the extradition.

Once Noriega is formally notified, he has one month to protest the decision. If he does so, it could go to France’s Council of State for a ruling. Noriega’s lawyers, however, have said he wants to return home and would not fight extradition.

Panamanians who fought against human rights abuses under Noriega’s 1983-1989 rule worry he could die in France and want to see him face justice at home.

Noriega’s legal team says he has blood pressure problems and is paralyzed on the left side as a result of a stroke four years ago. He says he is 77, though there is confusion about his true date of birth.

A Panamanian court has convicted Noriega in the death of military commander Moises Giroldi, who led a failed rebellion Oct. 3, 1989. Noriega faces 20 years in jail in the case.
