

Noriega judge delays decision

by bendweekly

MIAMI -- Ex-Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, imprisoned in Miami, must wait 11 days to learn whether he will be sent to Panama or France to face further charges. U.S. District Judge William Hoeverler told attorneys Monday he would announce his decision Aug. 24, just four days before a U.S. magistrate judge is to hear arguments on Noriega's extradition. French officials have called for Noriega to be shipped to France where he would face money laundering charges. The ex-Panamanian strongman's U.S. sentence ends Sept. 9. Noriega's attorneys have petitioned for their client to be returned to Panama, where he faces multiple murder charges. However, Hoeverler's ruling on whether Noriega, 72, can legally be sent to France will likely determine the magistrate's subsequent decision, according to experts. Meanwhile, attorneys for Noriega, who appeared in court wearing his khaki military garb replete with epaulets, continued Tuesday to argue the ex-general's extradition to France would violate the Geneva Convention. They accused federal prosecutors of violating the international treaty and "fundamentally altering the Constitution." Noriega was captured by U.S. forces during a 1989 invasion and convicted in 1992 of colluding with Colombian drug traffickers.

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