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## **Panama: 14 Former Military Officers & One Civilian Charged With Diverse Crimes**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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On Jan. 22, Panamanian officials told reporters that 14 military officers who served under Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega had been charged with crimes, and former ruling party legislator, Rigoberto Paredes, was under arrest for investigation of homicide. According to AP, Paredes was at the top of the list of 29 prisoners transferred from the US Army base at Fort Clayton to Panama's Modelo jail late Jan. 21. The Attorney General's office said authorities were studying possible charges of homicide, abuse of authority, personal injury and theft. The charges were reportedly based on complaints filed by Panamanian citizens and government officials. The highest-ranking of the military officers was Col. Alberto Purcell, third in command of Noriega's Defense Forces. He was charged with crimes against the state, the attorney general's office said. Three lieutenant colonels, five majors and four captains were held on charges that included abuse of authority, crimes against the state and public administration, theft, damage to public property and torture, officials said. All had turned themselves in or been arrested by US troops following the Dec. 20 invasion to overthrow Noriega. Attorneys for the detained men tried to file writs to obtain their release. Relatives of the detainees, waiting outside the Modelo Prison to visit, complained that the new government was not behaving any differently than the Noriega regime. Juan Materno Vazquez, a lawyer who is defending some of the prisoners, was cited by AP as saying: "It is an outrage. Their human and civil rights have been violated by the government, which first detains them and then invites charges and complaints against them." (Basic data from AP, 01/22/90)

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