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Panama: Anti-riot Troops Deployed To Cope With Crime Wave

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Aug. 6, Interior and Justice Minister Ricardo Arias Calderon announced that anti-riot troops have been deployed to reduce a crime wave affecting Panama City and other urban centers. The minister said that the administrative component of the two national police forces will be reduced to expand patrol operations, particularly in areas where banks are located. Arias Calderon also announced the Public Police Force (created in the aftermath of the US invasion) and the Judicial Technical Police (PTJ) have been authorized to utilize their weapons. According to Prensa Latina, the Cuban government's international news service, many Panamanians are opposed to the use of anti-riot troops, for fear they will be used to repress popular protest. Meanwhile, a large-scale police operation was in force to apprehend 110 inmates who recently escaped from the Coiba prison. Arias Calderon said four escapees had been wounded thus far in attempts to return them to their cells. Prensa Latina reported another riot at the Modelo prison. Public Force director Col. Eduardo Herrera said the riots were caused by the failure of the nation's court system to expedite justice. Prisoners complain of overcrowding and abysmal living conditions. (Basic data from Prensa Latina, 08/07/90)

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