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Deposed Police Chief Asserts President Endara May Be Tossed Out By Discontented Panamanians

by Deborah Tyroler

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In statements to local reporters on Aug. 25, deposed police chief Col. Eduardo Herrera, said that President Guillermo Endara could be overthrown by "the discontented masses," victimized by unemployment and the ongoing political and economic crisis, "not by the army." In a surprise move, Herrera was retired by Endara on Aug. 22. Herrera had served as chief of the Public Force (Fuerza Publica), created in the wake of the US invasion. Herrera said he had no knowledge of any plans for a coup, although he admitted that his retirement had caused "instability" among members of the police force. Official statistics indicate that some 300,000 Panamanians are unemployed, and 40% of all citizens live in poverty. Labor unions have denounced the government for dismissals of some 20,000 public employees, mainly for political reasons. Vice President and Planning Minister Guillermo Ford has stated that only 12,000 civil service employees were dismissed, most accused of having supported the regime of deposed general Manuel Noriega. (Basic data from AFP, 08/25/90)

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