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Panama: University Students Protest U.S. Military Presence

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Jan. 8, university students organized a demonstration outside the Foreign Ministry headquarters in Panama City to protest the US military's presence. Spokespersons said they chose to demonstrate on Tuesday, the eve of the anniversary of the deaths of 23 students at the hands of US troops in the Canal zone. The "flag riots" took place in 1964. The demonstrators were denied a meeting with Foreign Minister Julio Linares. Instead, they composed a message to Linares in which they described Dec. 20 as a "day of national mourning." Panama was invaded by US troops on Dec. 20, 1989. Antonio Mendez, leader of the University Student Committee for the Defense and Rescue of Sovereignty, said the government of President Guillermo Endara "defends the interests of the United States in Panama." The students denounced the government's role as an "accomplice," evidenced by its praise for the 1989 invasion, and request for US military intervention on Dec. 5 last year to quash a police rebellion in which two Panamanian police were killed. (Basic data from AFP, 01/08/91)

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