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U.S. Demonstrates Military Might In Panama

by Deborah Tyroler

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Unidentified US defense officials told AFP on May 23 that the US has decided to demonstrate its military prowess in Panama by sending convoys across the country. A defense official said, "We're obviously doing it only to make a point." The convoys consisting of some 10 vehicles carry armed soldiers who have been ordered not to allow themselves to be stopped by the Panamanian Defense Forces or roadblocks, said the defense officials, who requested anonymity. Two convoys had already travelled the width of the country, one crossing from the Atlantic coast and the other from the Pacific coast, said the officials. Both were escorted by members of the Panamanian military and travelled without incident, the officials said. Defense Department spokesperson Peter Williams acknowledged that the convoy operation had begun, but refused to give details. "There are convoys moving through Panama," he said. "These are convoys to exercise our treaty rights...We are moving equipment, men, material back and forth, among our various military installations in Panama." The 1977 Panama Canal Treaties provide for the free movement of US forces. The convoys are manned primarily by the nearly 2,000 additional troops ordered to Panama by President Bush two weeks ago to supplement the 11,000 already stationed in the country. (Basic data from AFP, 05/23/89)

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