

Panama hosting international military training exercises

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PANAMA

Panamanian authorities are preparing for Panamax 2010, a joint military exercise of 4,000 military and civilian participants from 22 Western-hemisphere nations set to be held in August 2010.

The United States will coordinate the exercise, designed to enhance the security of the Panama Canal against a terrorist attack on the canal's infrastructure.

According to official Panamanian government statements, the large contingent of US Engineering Special Forces that have been in Panama for months are preparing for these exercises - and not opening military bases designed to fight drug-smuggling, as some media members have speculated.

Panama disbanded its military in 1989 after the dictator General Manuel Noriega was ousted, and does not have a formal military. Instead, Panama will be training special departments of the National Police Force.