

# *Panamanian social groups condemn 'silent invasion' by U.S. troops*

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Panama City, Feb 12 (RHC)-- The arrival of 415 members of the U.S. Air Force in Panama has been described by social organizations and media outlets as a "silent invasion." The deployment of the troops, authorized to wear full uniform and carry weapons, was part of a bilateral deal signed between the Panamanian and U.S. governments, called "New Horizons."

The Popular Alternative Movement (MAP) condemned the arrival of the troops, who will remain until midway through 2018. Such actions represent "a clear message from Washington against any Panamanian policy that is not subordinated" to U.S. interests, placing "the Panamanian government at the center of the plans to militarily invade" Venezuela, the MAP said.

Ramon Malave, of the U.S. Southern Command in Panama, claimed such deployments are "exercises of humanitarian assistance." The Panamanian foreign ministry, however, in an official note said: "It is a training program intended for national security sectors." Malave said such "humanitarian assistance" has been carried out in Panama since 2003, but some observers believe the new mobilization – coming days after U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson wrapped up his Latin America tour – is a strategic move to

carry out military action in Venezuela.

International analyst Julio Yao said the deployment constitutes a flagrant violation of the Treaty of Neutrality, which regulates relations between Panama and the United States regarding the Panama Canal.

The "New Horizons" exercises will be carried out in the provinces of Darien, Veraguas and Coclé, and can be extended to "any other place approved by the government of Panama and the embassy," according to the agreement.

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