

*Trump reportedly orders military
to draw up plans to seize Panama
Canal*

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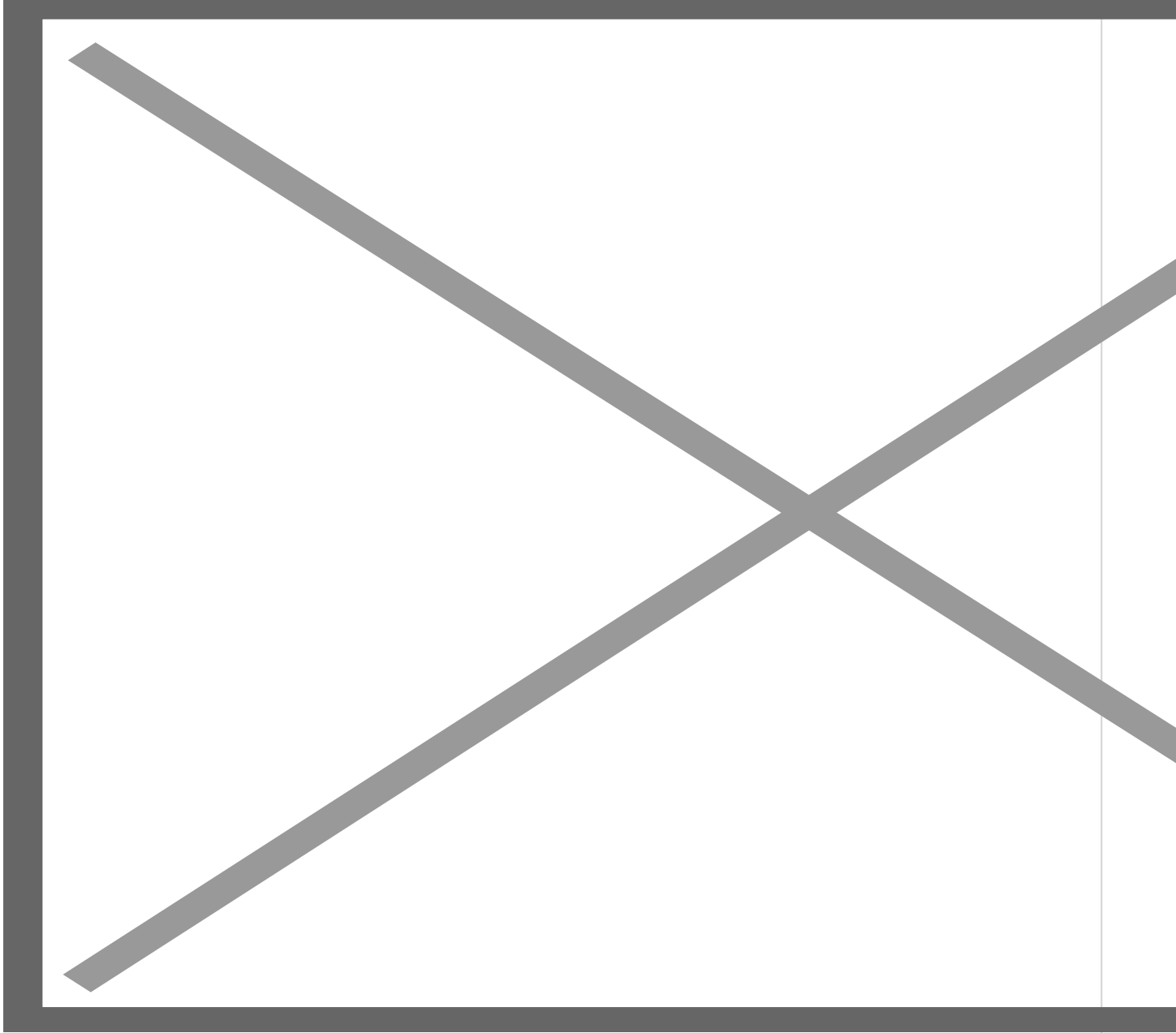


Photo of troops landing in Panama during U.S. invasion in December 1989

Washington, March 23 (RHC)-- The White House has reportedly ordered the U.S. military to develop plans to increase troops in Panama to "help President Donald Trump's goal of recovering the Panama Canal."

U.S. Southern Command is responsible for operations and security in Central America and is developing ideas for working with the Panamanian military instead of the less likely option of U.S. troops taking the canal by force.

According to the Trump administration, recovering the canal is a part of the plan to reduce China's influence over the region. "To further enhance our national security, my administration will be reclaiming the Panama Canal, and we've already started doing it," Donald Trump said in a joint address to Congress last month.

Panama and China have denied any foreign interference in the 50-mile canal. Chinese officials have accused the U.S. of coercing Panamanian officials to block aid projects from China.

U.S. Southern Command Chief Admiral Alvin Holsey sent draft strategies to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth before his visit to Panama next month. The Southern Command has expressed that military action will only be necessary if Panama doesn't allow Trump to reclaim the canal.

Trump said he wants control of the canal to eliminate the high tolls U.S. ships pay to travel through it and because, in the end, "it belongs to us."

[SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS]

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