

U.S. SOUTHCOM United States Southern Command NEWS RELEASE



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SOUTHCOM deploys disaster assistance team to Panama, Costa Rica

PANAMA CITY, Panamá -- A team of 48 U.S. military personnel and seven helicopters from Honduras-based Joint Task Force-Bravo deployed to Panama and Costa Rica this week, where they are working alongside local officials to help communities impacted by heavy rains and flooding.

The team, comprised of aviation and medical personnel, is supporting rescue and recovery efforts in coordination with national disaster response organizations from each country.

Authorities in both countries declared a state of emergency and submitted requests for assistance through their respective U.S. embassies after persistent rains resulted in several deaths and endangered thousands of residents near Limon, Costa Rica, as well as western Panama and other areas along the Caribbean coast.

"U.S. Southern Command and JTF-Bravo have worked tirelessly on search and rescue missions and to take much needed disaster assistance to those most in need, showing the best face of the United States to Panama and the rest of the region," said Barbara J. Stephenson, U.S. Ambassador to Panama. "The quick response of our military has built tremendous good will with the Panamanian people."

On Nov. 25, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command diverted the U.S. Navy frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts from the Eastern Pacific to Panama to provide immediate assistance. The ship conducted damage assessments through Nov. 27 before returning to its original mission in support of U.S. counter-illicit trafficking operations.

"We're committed to assisting our friends and neighbors affected by the flooding," said Col. Richard Juergens, JTF-Bravo commander. "Joint Task Force-Bravo will actively support the Panamanian and Costa Rican government to help save lives. JTF-Bravo is well equipped and trained for these types of emergencies, and consequently, when called upon, we have the capability to deliver assistance quickly."

Any U.S. military assistance to a foreign country must be requested by the host nation through the U.S. ambassador. Then, as the lead U.S. federal agency, USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance fields the request and asks the Department of Defense for military assistance, if needed.

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Links to online pages containing additional information:

U.S. Southern Command: <http://www.southcom.mil>

Links to online pages containing imagery:

U.S. Southern Command: <http://www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/factFiles.php?id=90>