

Troops deployed to quell S. African mobs

by UPI

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa -- Spreading xenophobic violence in South Africa prompted President Thabo Mbeki to deploy military personnel to the streets in several cities. The decision was announced after police reported instances of violence in the Durban, South Africa, suburb of Umbilo, The Independent reported Thursday. A South African government official said the violence claimed at least 40 lives and displaced 28,000 people, CNN reported. Police said they've arrested about 400 people for crimes including murder, property damage and causing a public disturbance. Violence against migrants began 11 days ago in Johannesburg and spread into the Zulu heartland, the British newspaper said. Refugees from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi and other African countries have been targeted by mobs demanding migrants return to their homelands. Protesters claim the estimated 5 million migrants are taking their jobs, receive preferential housing, push down wages and commit crime. Essop Pahad, an aide to Mbeki, suggested some may be exploiting frustrations. "We need to understand that xenophobia has historically been used by right-wing populist movements to mobilize particularly the lumpen proletariat against minority groups in society," he said in Johannesburg. "Political mobilization on the basis of xenophobia poses grave threats to progressive forces in our society and to our democracy."

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