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Guatemalan Defense Minister Denies U.S. Troops Assisting Army In War Against Guerrillas

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On May 7, Defense Minister Gen. Hector Gramajo denied that Guatemala is receiving military aid from the US government in any form, including assistance by US troops in the Army's fight against the guerrillas. In a statement appearing in the local press on May 4, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), asserted that the US military was engaged in "covert intervention" in Guatemala. Gramajo acknowledged that US soldiers are present in Solola department. The soldiers, he said, are collaborating in construction of a highway, and are not "fighting guerrillas." He did not mention the number of US troops in Solola. Next, the minister said that in the previous week US Chinook helicopters were involved in "civilian assistance," and had not participated in "any type of military operation." The helicopters, said Gramajo, transported sheet metal, grain and blankets for residents of Solola department, and for peasants who are interested in returning to the area. In its statement, the URNG said Guatemalan troops participate in joint military exercises with US troops based at the Southern Command in Panama. Next, the guerrilla coalition claimed that a US Navy logistical support ship, the USS Sphinx, has made several deliveries at a Guatemalan naval base. Finally, the URNG reported that US Chinook (CH-47) helicopters and C-130 military transport copters have carried troops and supplies for the Guatemalan Army to conflict zones. (Basic data from Notimex, 05/07/89; Xinhua, 05/08/89)

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