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Vice President Quayle Visits Central America

by Deborah Tyroler

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On June 11, Vice President Dan Quayle began a four-day tour of Central America, excluding Nicaragua and Panama. The stated purposes of the tour were to cultivate support for the US position on Panama, and to discuss further steps that might be adopted by Washington in the event the Organization of American States mission fails. Also on the agenda were discussions related to the regional peace process, and security questions. On Sunday evening, Quayle met with Guatemalan Foreign Minister Mario Palencia on the eve of Palencia's departure for Panama as part of the OAS team attempting to negotiate a solution to the Panamanian crisis. Palencia reportedly told Quayle, "There was a new plan, a new formula, that was being applied, in the thus far unsuccessful effort to remove [Gen. Manuel Antonio] Noriega." On Monday morning, Quayle told a group of Guatemalan political and community leaders: "Our bottom line is that Noriega must leave, not only from power, but also it is our position that he should leave the country." In a meeting with Guatemalan Defense Minister Hector Alejandro Gramajo, Quayle reportedly asked that the message be relayed to the Panamanian Defense Forces regarding US opposition to Noriega, not the Panamanian military. Quayle also met with Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo. At the national palace, Cerezo told reporters that while he supports democracy in Panama, its national sovereignty must also be respected. "It is important to not confuse bilateral relations," between the United States and Panama, "with the concerns of the hemisphere," he said. On the same day, Quayle traveled to Tegucigalpa, where he met with Honduran President Jose Azcona Hoyo, and two presidential candidates for the Honduran November elections. In reference to reports that Nicaragua would send arms to Panama in the event of a US attack, Quayle told reporters that he was concerned about an axis formed by Panama, Cuba and Nicaragua, a development he said "would destabilize Central America." Azcona told reporters that his position regarding Noriega coincided with that of the US government. Latin American governments have not shown much enthusiasm for interfering in Panama beyond verbal condemnations of Noriega for invalidating the results of the May 7 election. Quayle visited El Salvador on Tuesday. Before Quayle's departure, officials in Washington said his trip to El Salvador was designed in part to demonstrate support for the recently inaugurated administration of President Alfredo Cristiani. Quayle was scheduled to arrive in Costa Rica on the evening of June 13. Costa Rican sources told reporters June 12 that officials planned to discuss with the vice president their government's concerns about foreign debt restructuring, and the continuity and expansion of the Caribbean Basin Initiative. (Basic data from AP, AFP, Xinhua, Notimex, 06/12/89)

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