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Central American Officials Discuss Demilitarization Proposal

by Deborah Tyroler

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On July 31 in San Jose (Costa Rica), officials from the five Central American nations discussed regional security, weapons and army size limitations, and verification strategies for the first time since the initiation of the regional peace process. The group known as the Security Commission is composed of representatives of the military high commands of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras, and Costa Rica's foreign minister. Also in attendance were delegates from the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations. Terms of a proposal prepared by Nicaraguan army commander-in-chief Gen. Humberto Ortega appeared in a document submitted to deputy ministers of defense and foreign relations. According to Notimex, the proposal by the Nicaraguan government calls for the following: * Reduction or a freeze on all types of military aircraft and helicopters, military airstrips and hangars, tanks, 120mm-plus mortars, self-propelled anti-aircraft cannons, 120mm-plus multiple warheads, missile-launchers, 160mm-plus heavy artillery and self-propelled artillery, missile-launchers placed on warships, and navy vessels of over 100 MT (water displacement). * Freeze on acquisition of all type of war material, excepting munitions and replacement parts. * Prohibition on foreign participation in military exercises in Central American territory. * Freeze on armed forces personnel. * Preparation of inventories on quantity and type of armaments. * Establishment of a time-table for military personnel and defense budget reductions. The Nicaraguan government proposes the creation of a verification commission headed by the OAS and UN secretaries general, and a regional friendship and non-aggression treaty. Guatemalan and Salvadoran officials insisted that respective guerrilla organizations must enter into cease-fire agreements before any serious moves on weapons and military personnel reductions can proceed. Participants in the commission agreed to convene on a bi-monthly basis. The second meeting is scheduled for Sept. 10-11 in San Salvador, and talks will focus on defining the military needs of each country with respect to physical size, geopolitical position, population and domestic conditions. (Basic data from Notimex, 07/31/90, 08/01/90; AP, 08/01/90)

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