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Guatemala: Justifications On Maintaining Military Strength

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Aug. 13, the Military Studies Center (CEM) said the Guatemalan army cannot be cut back, but that subsequent to a resolution of the armed conflict, the army will be able to modify its activities. CEM director Navy Capt. Jorge Arturo Masariego said that military troop numbers have not increased since 1982. Regional treaties specify that military troop numbers of each Central American nation should not exceed 1% of the nation's total population, said Masariego. He added that the Guatemalan armed forces do not surpass the specified proportion, based on a total population of 8.5 million. In 1988, according to Masariego, 1.4% of GDP was dedicated to military spending, compared to 1.1% in 1990. Thirty percent of the latter, he said, was spent on civilian welfare programs implemented by the military, including literacy, road construction, and health programs. Next, Masariego asserted that the civil self-defense patrols were created in the early 1980s to compensate for the army's inadequate numbers for protecting rural villages against rebel attack. When the armed conflict has ended, he said, the role of the civil patrols can be transformed from military to civilian in order to carry out rural development projects. According to former defense minister Gen. Hector Alejandro Gramajo, the armed forces numbered 900,000 in the early 1980s, compared to 400,000 at present. (Basic data from Notimex, 08/05/90)

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