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El Salvador: President Claims Rebels Obtained More Surface-to-air Missiles From Nicaraguan Army

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During a June 7 press conference, President Alfredo Cristiani claimed the Nicaraguan army provided the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) with more Soviet-made surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). According to Cristiani, "The FMLN has continued to receive weapons, and lately we have seen how they got SA-16 surface-to-air missiles that are even more sophisticated than the ones they returned to the Nicaraguan government a few months ago." The president said he found it hard to believe that senior Nicaraguan officers know nothing about these arms deals. "Surface-to-air missiles are not handled by lower-ranking Sandinista army officers. These are sophisticated weapons and are probably subject to special control. It is no secret the Sandinistas have always supported the FMLN," Cristiani said. [In 1990, the FMLN received 28 SAMs from Nicaraguan army officers. The rebels returned 11 of the weapons to the Nicaraguan government in February and three Sandinista army officers were later sentenced to 3-1/2 years in prison for supplying the weapons.] In a June 8 broadcast by YSU radio, FMLN commander Francisco Jovel (Roberto Roca) said the rebels have no SAM-16s at present. Jovel asserted that Cristiani "is trying to lay the groundwork for asking the US for more military aid." According to Jovel, the charge was "part of the psychological war" which the government is waging before the next round of peace talks. On June 9 in Managua, Nicaraguan Defense Ministry spokesperson Lt.Col. Ricardo Wheelock denied that the FMLN had received SAMs from the Nicaraguan army. In statements published in daily newspaper El Nuevo Diario, Wheelock said that all of Cristiani's assertions were lies. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, AP, 06/07/91; AFP, 06/07-09/91, ACAN-EFE, 06/09/91)

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