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Guatemala: Update On Fighting & Political Violence, February 1 - 24

by Deborah Tyroler

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Feb. 1: The army press office (DIDE) reported that Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) rebels damaged a military tank during an ambush near La Democracia, Escuintla department. Feb. 2: Defense Minister Gen. Jose Garcia told reporters that military presence in Escuintla had been expanded due to increased rebel activity. According to Garcia, the rebels' objective is "to assault and rob" civilians traveling through the area. Feb 14: Local reporters told the Agence France-Presse that rebels blocked traffic between the towns of Patulul, Suchitepequez department and Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa, Escuintla. Several clashes between troops and rebels occurred, but no report on casualties was available. DIDE reported that rebels have been carrying out "assaults against truck drivers" since Feb. 13 in Escuintla and Retalhuleu departments. According to DIDE, rebels are trying to "advertise and achieve some prominence by intimidating the civilian population." Next, rebels blocked a section of the Escuintla highway by commandeering 10 trucks, positioning them to obstruct traffic, and slashing their tires. In addition, rebels downed power lines in Escuintla, causing blackouts in several municipalities. Troops clashed with rebels in several locales in Escuintla, causing damage to several vehicles, including a military tank. No casualties were reported. Feb. 20: Military spokespersons reported one civilian killed during a clash between soldiers and rebels at San Felipe, Retalhuleu department. Three rebels were killed at Patulul, Suchitepequez department. Next, two rebels were killed and an rebel camp dismantled at Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa, Escuintla. According to Cerigua, rebels occupied a police station and a state-run communications company office at San Felipe, Retalhuleu. In a communique dispatched from the office, the URNG denounced the army's forced recruitment, demanded prosecution of human rights violators, requested the elimination of civil defense paramilitary units and the military intelligence (G-2) division, and called on the government to reduce troop strength and military spending. Next, the rebels demanded respect for the rights of indigenous people, payment of a minimum wage to agricultural workers, and an end to unjustified dismissals of workers. Military spokespersons told reporters that the army is studying the possibility of reinforcing military presence in rural areas to prevent rebel attacks against civilians. Feb. 24: DIDE spokespersons said eight families were arrested Dec. 16 in El Quiche department on charges of membership in the URNG. The arrests occurred in Chajul, one of the three municipalities which form the Ixil Triangle. Residents are members of the Ixil indigenous community. The Cerigua news agency reported that army troops launched a mortar attack Feb. 16 on a road in the Chajul area following an attack by rebels against a military patrol. On Feb. 19, the army bombed Pueblo Nuevo, also in Chajul, and dropped bombs on crops near Cuarto Pueblo, El Quiche department. Local firefighters told reporters that at least two soldiers were killed and two others wounded in fighting at San Mateo Ixtahuacan. Two soldiers were killed at Cajola, Quetzaltenango department. Military spokespersons reported that a bomb exploded outside the USAC law school. Another bomb was deactivated on the campus. No casualties were reported. The event occurred just hours before Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari was scheduled to deliver a speech at USAC. (Basic data from Agencia
Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 02/03/92, 02/15/92, 02/20/92, 02/24/92; Agence France-Presse, 02/03/92, 02/14/92, 02/20/92, 02/24/92)

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