2-28-1992

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F.m.l.n. Charges Honduran & Salvadoran Military Aircraft Flying Over Rebel Disarmament Zones

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Category/Department: General
Published: Friday, February 28, 1992

Feb. 24: Radio Farabundo Marti reported that rebel units were put on nationwide alert following reports that Salvadoran Air Force (FAS) airplanes and helicopters flew over rebel camps. The report indicated that Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) rebels received orders to open fire on military aircraft if the flyovers were repeated. According to the report, the aircraft flew over camps in Cabanas, Morazan and San Miguel departments, and in the vicinity of the Guazapa volcano outside San Salvador. Rebel sources pointed out that the peace accords require the FAS to obtain permission from the UN observer mission to El Salvador (ONUSAL) prior to attempting flyovers in designated rebel disarmament areas. Feb. 25: In a local television broadcast, FAS commander Col. Hector Lovo reported that for the second time in two days, "unidentified airplanes" entered Salvadoran airspace. Lovo denied that the aircraft pertained to the FAS. He said investigations were underway to determine the origin of the unidentified planes. FMLN leader Joaquin Villalobos said that deputy defense minister Gen. Orlando Zepeda had confirmed the airplanes pertained to the Honduran Air Force (FAH). ONUSAL military division chief Gen. Victor Suanzes said the planes did not pertain to the FAS. He added that ONUSAL was conducting an investigation. According to Suanzes, the complaint filed by the FMLN on Feb. 24 listed the following flyovers: O-2 airplane and a UH-1M helicopter, Santa Marta and Villa Victoria, located in northern El Salvador; F-5 jet, Guazapa volcano; two A-37 airplanes and an 0-2 airplane, Joateca, Perquin and Torola in Morazan department; and, two transport helicopters, Cacahuatique and Chapeltique, San Miguel department. Local press reports indicated that Honduran troops carried out military maneuvers near the Salvadoran border. FMLN commander Raul Hercules, member of the commission coordinating the cease-fire with the army, said the incident could have been orchestrated by Salvadoran army personnel opposed to the peace process. Honduras armed forces spokesperson Col. Napoleon Santos Palacios denied that Honduran aircraft violated Salvadoran airspace. Santos said, "There is no possibility that our airplanes have crossed the border [into El Salvador]." He added that the accusations by the FMLN constituted a "threat to our country." Honduran President Rafael Callejas denied that FAH planes flew over FMLN camps. He said investigations into such reports had turned up no evidence of Honduran air force participation. Feb. 26: Rebel sources indicated that an unidentified aircraft flew over rebel camps in Usulutan department. In statements to reporters, FMLN commander Eduardo Sancho said the incursion of aircraft into rebel territory constituted a "provocation." He added that since Feb. 20, there had been repeated incidents of unauthorized flights over rebel camps, although this activity by Salvadoran air force planes had declined. Sancho said that FMLN troops were on general alert and were under orders to shoot down all aircraft. Despite the commotion about flyovers, he added, the peace process "is irreversible" and not in danger. (Basic data from Agence France-Presse, 02/24/92, 02/25/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 02/25/92; Notimex, 02/26/92)