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Summary Of Developments: Salvadoran Government & Rebels Accuse Honduras Of Airspace Violations

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Feb. 25: Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) leader Jorge Melendez ("Jonas") told a local radio station that unidentified military aircraft flew over designated rebel disarmament zones in San Salvador and Morazan departments. According to reports cited by Agence France-Presse, US troops and aircraft were involved in joint maneuvers with the Honduran military near the border with El Salvador. Feb. 26: San Salvador Mayor and Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) leader Armando Calderon Sol asserted that the aircraft sighted Feb. 25 pertained to the Honduran Air Force (FAH). FMLN commander Melendez said that an unidentified aircraft was sighted near Las Marias, Usulutan department. Feb. 27: In a protest note addressed to Honduran Foreign Minister Mario Carias, Salvadoran deputy foreign minister Ricardo Valdivieso formally charged Honduras with violations of Salvadoran airspace. According to the letter, on Feb. 24, two A-37 planes belonging to the FAH flew over areas of Morazan and Chalatenango departments. The letter said the incursions represented a threat to Salvadoran "national security and to the peace process." The Honduran foreign ministry issued a statement rejecting the Salvadoran protest and denying the allegations as "totally unfounded." FMLN leader Maria Marta Valladares ("Nidia Diaz") told a local television station that members of the Honduran military high command had acknowledged responsibility for the Feb. 24 incursion. Next, Valladares charged that aircraft pertaining to the Bolivian air force had recently flown over the country. She added that the UN observer mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) had not been informed of this activity beforehand, as called for in the cease-fire accords. FMLN leader Octavio Ortiz charged that the Bolivian plane was part of an intelligence mission aimed at locating rebel positions. Feb. 28: At a meeting of the cease-fire working group, FMLN representatives denounced that military aircraft had again flown over rebel positions in Morazan and San Vicente departments, and over parts of San Salvador, including the Sheraton Hotel, where members of the FMLN general command and ONUSAL members were lodged. Army spokespersons denied FMLN assertions that planes involved in flights over rebel encampments pertained to the Salvadoran Air Force (FAS), charging instead that the aircraft had come from Honduras. Deputy foreign minister Ricardo Valdivieso confirmed that the government had contracted with a Bolivian firm to carry out aerial cartographic surveys. Feb. 29: Juan Ramon Medrano, FMLN member of the cease-fire working group, asserted that planes involved in the overflights belonged to the FAS. He added that ONUSAL personnel stationed at FAS bases were in a position to account for all takeoffs and landings of military aircraft. Medrano said the FMLN would consider suspending disarmament activities if the overflights continued. March 4: Honduran armed forces spokespersons reported that Salvadoran soldiers and rebels engaged in a three-hour battle in Salvadoran territory near the Honduran border in the San Luis de Las Reinas area. According to the report, on March 1, Honduran army personnel observed two FAS planes in the area and later heard machinegun fire and several bomb explosions. The spokespersons indicated that the Honduran army high command "would continue monitoring the situation to avoid violations of Honduran airspace or national territory." An undisclosed number of Honduran army reinforcements were deployed to the border area. ONUSAL released a statement asserting that Honduran reports of
clashes between FMLN combatants and Salvadoran soldiers were false. (Basic data from Notimex, 02/26/92; Salpress, 02/26/92, 02/27/92; Inter Press Service, 02/27/92; Chinese news service Xinhua, 03/03/92; Agence France-Presse, 02/25-27/92, 02/29/92, 03/04/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 02/26/92, 02/27/92, 02/29/92, 03/04/92)

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