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## **Salvadoran Defense Minister Says Costa Rican Police Forces Represent "army In Disguise"**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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In Aug. 17 statements, Salvadoran Defense Minister Gen. Rene Emilio Ponce cast doubt on Costa Rica's claim to being a demilitarized country, asserting that Costa Rican police forces constitute "an army in disguise." Ponce made the remark in response to questions from reporters regarding regional trends toward demilitarization and abolition of armed forces. Citing the US and Costa Rica as examples, he asserted there is no contradiction between democracy and the existence of a strong military. According to Ponce, Costa Rica currently has 27,000 members in the country's public security forces, "and they are armed and in uniform just like soldiers anywhere else." He defended the continued existence of military institutions throughout Central America as "essential for the stability of any democratic system." On Aug. 18, President Rafael Calderon rejected Ponce's charges and reiterated that there are no military institutions in Costa Rica. According to Calderon, some countries have a historic need for maintaining military forces, "but Costa Rica is not one of them." (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 08/17/92; Notimex, 08/18/92)

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