

9-6-2001

Regional Presidents Hold Summits To Ease Tensions

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Regional Presidents Hold Summits To Ease Tensions." (2001). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/8881>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Regional Presidents Hold Summits To Ease Tensions

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Nicaragua Honduras

Published: 2001-09-06

Amid growing tensions regarding unsettled boundary disputes, espionage, and an alleged aggressive arms program in Honduras, Central American presidents were active in minisummits during late August. On Aug. 27, Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Aleman and Salvadoran President Francisco Flores met in Managua and announced a 23-point agreement aimed at settling various bilateral issues primarily concerning fishing rights in the Gulf of Fonseca, which Nicaragua and El Salvador share with Honduras. The agreement also touched on security matters and economic integration.

Since Honduras accused both El Salvador and Nicaragua of spying (see NotiCen, 2001-08-23), Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Francisco Aguirre was careful to deny any suggestion that the meeting was meant to exclude or isolate Honduras. On returning home, Flores told a news conference that the meeting was "completely public" so there would be no doubt that the purpose was to strengthen relations between the two countries. Presumably, this was meant to assure Honduras that the two nations accused of spying had not agreed on anything injurious to Honduran interests. But he admitted that the relations between Honduras and El Salvador were still tense after the spy incident.

The practical accomplishment of the meeting was an agreement on fishing rights in the Gulf of Fonseca. The two governments signed an Acuerdo de Cooperacion para la Proteccion y Aprovechamiento de los Recursos Pesqueros, designed to limit fishing and maintain ecological balance in the gulf region. The agreement promised increased efforts to develop a ferry system on the Gulf of Fonseca for the use of the three countries that share it. The agreement also recognized regional efforts to resolve the current crisis in the coffee industry, prepare for natural disasters, and fight organized crime and drug trafficking, especially in the Gulf of Fonseca.

Private summit in Guatemala skirts border issues

On Aug. 31, the presidents of Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador met in the Guatemalan capital for a larger summit in response to the recent accusations of espionage and an armaments buildup. The results suggest the leaders were more interested in calming tensions during the present election campaigns than in thrashing out solutions. The summit had been called earlier in the year to deal with integration issues, but the agenda was altered to include discussion of the current tensions.

Details on the four-hour private summit were sparse. Instead of a published final declaration, Guatemalan President Arnold Portillo released a recorded message in which he said, "We have agreed to strengthen the peace as well as consolidate democracy and the rule of law....The problems we have will be resolved in accordance with findings in international courts or personally among the presidents."

President Flores of El Salvador said that one of their agreements was to postpone discussion of the territorial and maritime boundary issues because it was "inconvenient" to debate boundary questions in public during election campaigns. He also said they discussed measures to control regional arms expenditures. "Each of us," Flores said, "ought to send signals that we have control over military spending, so as not to create the idea that we are increasing spending at a time when it would heat up the public debate and damage relationships in the region."

By discretely skirting the boundary issues, the summit essentially agreed to do nothing, since that issue is tied to all the others, including the spy-arms accusations. Based on Portillo's statement that "there is a pact to strengthen peace and democracy, to avoid aggression," the media reported that the presidents had signed a nonaggression pact. But on Sept. 3, Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Aguirre denied any such pact. He said the matter was raised during the summit but nothing was signed. "The differences persist," he said. Aguirre said that the tensions could continue for some time because of Honduran military policies. However, the talks apparently reduced the noisy sword rattling and spying accusations.

Honduran President Carlos Flores accepted Nicaraguan assurances that it had no interest in spying. And Nicaragua appears to have dropped its allegation that Honduras was planning aggressive military operations. Aguirre said that it was clear during the summit that Honduras was not expansionist but rather was interested in defining boundaries with its neighbors, "and that is causing misunderstanding and uneasiness." The presidents agreed to meet again to see that the tensions do not "degenerate into an armed conflict."

Aguirre announced that the military chiefs of Honduras, Nicaragua, and possibly El Salvador would meet for further talks in late September in the US at the invitation of Gen. Peter Pace, chief of the US Southern Command. Meanwhile, the espionage argument is on hold. Nicaragua says it was not spying, although it has documents that Honduras says came from its armed forces.

The Nicaraguan daily *El Nuevo Diario* showed copies of some of the documents to Honduran armed forces spokesman Col. Carlos Eduardo Andino Cobos. "Are these documents legitimate?," asked the interviewer. "Yes they are legitimate," said Andino. "There are the signatures and seals. This document shows there is espionage against the armed forces of Honduras. Here is where the espionage comes in. It worries me that you are showing me so much [Honduran] documentation."

-- End --