

8-8-2002

Neighbors Claim Nicaragua's Oil Exploration Violates Boundaries

LADB Staff

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

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Neighbors Claim Nicaragua's Oil Exploration Violates Boundaries." (2002). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/8994>

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.

Neighbors Claim Nicaragua's Oil Exploration Violates Boundaries

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Central America

Published: 2002-08-08

The Nicaraguan government's recent announcement that it was taking bids from US oil companies to explore for oil in the Caribbean has brought it into renewed border conflicts with the governments of Honduras and Colombia.

The Honduran government claims that one area of planned oil exploration lies between the 15th and 17th parallels, which is disputed territory between the two countries.

The Colombian government claims that the planned exploration also encroaches upon its territory. Nicaragua's territorial dispute with Honduras and Colombia, which has simmered since the 1980s, is under litigation at the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

Dispute dates back to 1928

The origins of the dispute can be traced back to the US occupation of Nicaragua in the 1920s. In 1928, Nicaragua signed a treaty recognizing the 15th parallel as its maritime boundary with Honduras (see NotiCen, 2000-01-27). The treaty also ceded the islands of San Andres and Providencia, as well as the Serrana, Roncador, and Quitasueno keys, to Colombia (see EcoCentral, 1997-02-27).

In 1980, Nicaragua's Sandinista government rejected the 1928 treaty, arguing that it had been signed by an illegitimate puppet government under US military occupation. Sandinista President Daniel Ortega (1979-1990) claimed that the US pressured Nicaragua into signing the treaty to compensate Colombia for the loss of its Panamanian province that resulted from a US-sponsored revolt in 1903. Since 1980, Nicaragua has set its maritime boundary with Honduras along a diagonal line drawn from the Rio Coco at the 15th parallel northeast to the 17th parallel.

Nicaragua continues to reject Colombian sovereignty over the San Andres Archipelago and the islands of Providencia and Santa Catalina, which lie east of Nicaragua in the Caribbean. The Nicaraguan daily El Nuevo Diario published an opinion piece by geographer Dr. Mauricio Martinez Espinosa asserting that the islands of San Andres and Providencia are part of Nicaragua's continental shelf. The two islands lie on an embankment of the Caribbean basin that is only 170 km from the Nicaraguan coast, compared to 650 km from the Colombian coast.

Nicaragua maintains tariff against Honduras

Since 1999, the Nicaraguan government has been embroiled in a dispute with Honduras regarding the Honduran legislature's ratification of a treaty with Colombia that recognizes Honduras' disputed maritime boundary with Nicaragua and Colombian sovereignty over disputed territories in the

Caribbean (see NotiCen, 2000-01-27). Nicaragua has claimed that Honduras' treaty with Colombia deprives it of 130,000 sq km of its territory.

In December 1999, Nicaragua filed a complaint against Honduras and Colombia at The Hague. On June 5 of this year, Nicaragua and Honduras presented their first oral arguments before the International Court. The governments of both countries have agreed to comply with the decision of the Court, which will be made at the beginning of 2004.

Nicaragua's Ministry of Foreign Relations says that the Nicaraguan government "resorted to the International Court of Justice to resolve the conflict because the Court is the most suitable medium recognized by international law, and accepted by all States, to put an end to a controversy that has lasted so many years." The Ministry added that the decision to resolve the issue at The Hague demonstrated "the peaceful spirit of Nicaragua, which rejects the use of force as a means of solving international disagreements." Nicaragua's other response to the ratification of the treaty was the imposition of a 35% tariff on imports from Honduras and Colombia (see NotiCen, 2000-01-27). Nicaragua maintains the tariff against Honduras, arguing that its purpose is to cover the expenses of the International Court case.

President Enrique Bolanos says the tariff was a simple countermeasure to Honduras' ratification of a treaty that violates Nicaraguan sovereignty. "If the measure that Honduras took were to disappear, the countermeasure would disappear," the Nicaraguan president said. Honduran industrialists have requested that Honduras apply the same tariff against Nicaraguan imports or adopt other measures to force Nicaragua to lift the tariff. The Honduran administration of President Ricardo Maduro recently threatened to impose such a tariff.

Nicaragua says oil exploration will not affect neighbors Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Norman Caldera said the territory of the planned oil exploration has always belonged to Nicaragua, and, "at the end of the trial at The Hague, it will be definitively confirmed that it is Nicaraguan territory."

On July 16, Honduran Foreign Minister Guillermo Perez responded to the planned oil exploration with a veiled threat, saying, "Honduras reserves the right to carry out any actions it considers pertinent to defend its maritime interests." However, the following day the Honduran government was quick to dispel rumors that it had threatened to send troops to the border. "The government has not ordered any mobilization of its soldiers," said Defense Minister Federico Breve during a news conference.

The Honduran Foreign Minister claims that Nicaragua is attempting to use the oil concession to encroach upon 30,000 sq km that have "historically" belonged to Honduras. He warns the oil companies involved in the bidding for the Nicaraguan contract that exploration in disputed territory could involve serious legal problems. The Honduran government is exploring the option of launching a formal complaint at The Hague.

On July 18, the Colombian government confirmed that it was sending a letter of protest to the Nicaraguan government, claiming that the oil contract encroached upon Colombian territory. "The deliberate and unfriendly attitude of Nicaragua demonstrates once again the tendency of that

country to act in flagrant violation of the principles of good faith and of the norms of international law," the letter stated. Despite a Colombian deputy's recent request that the Colombian government send military reinforcements to the island of San Andres, Colombian officials have indicated that the situation is calm and does not require such action.

-- End --