
Preface

This study, initiated in November, 1987, resulted from a variety of factors coming together in previous months at both a political and an institutional level. Politically, the apparent breakthrough in the Central American crisis in Guatemala on 7 August 1987, where the Esquipulas II agreement was signed by all five Central American presidents, seemed finally to signal the beginning of a peaceful resolution of conflicts in the area. The draft Contadora Act, an even less ambitious agreement, had already implied the requirement for extensive verification of what two experts had called "the most comprehensive multilateral regional arms control document ever submitted for international consideration."¹ The Esquipulas agreement would be even more demanding and it soon became clear that there was a distinct lack of understanding about what such verification requirements, and their implications, might be.

Canadian backing for the Contadora process had been constant and at a high political level. The same day as the signing of Esquipulas II, the Secretary of State for External Affairs expressed Canada's support for it. Ottawa's desire to help the peace process along had been obvious for some time and Esquipulas II sparked new hope after the slowing down of the Contadora initiatives in 1986. It was clear Canada would wish to be at least equally active in this new phase of the peace process and our offers of help were greeted warmly by all the Central American states. The probability of a considerable Canadian role was great if the peace process advanced and interest in the implications of this role grew.

Meanwhile the Verification Research Unit (VRU) of the Department of External Affairs had been active in setting up a program of research on the verification of arms control agreements and the problems therewith. A series of publications has resulted, including ones with a focus on Third World regional arms control. The VRU hoped to draw on experience developed with respect to other regions of the world to address issues in Central Europe, which is the area of most direct interest to Canada.

While originating from somewhat different interests, this paper addresses the requirements and potential problems of implementing the verification provisions of a Central American peace accord, most likely the Esquipulas II agreement itself and some further arrangement following up on it.