
Back-up Political Verification

As mentioned in the last section, verification of the essentially "political" elements of a Central American peace accord could be key to such an agreement's success. This is especially true if United States demands for Nicaraguan "democratization" are to be met and if insurgent groups are to be brought fully into the peace negotiations. While unlikely to be the responsibility of a military observer mission, such a task would almost certainly fall on outside countries to undertake. Indeed, experts on peacekeeping and verification have repeatedly stressed that such international and extra-regional verification responsibilities should be shouldered exclusively by the international community. The fate of Esquipulas' CIVS emphasizes starkly the difficulties of such verification agencies operating in the region.

Democratization and the holding of free elections will require close verification, not just in Nicaragua, but in all countries in the region except Costa Rica. Again the Esquipulas and post-Esquipulas experience with national reconciliation commissions and amnesties justifies considerable scepticism where the ease of such verification is concerned. Free elections, either to national legislatures or to a Central American parliament, also demand observation on the part of one or some international or at least extra-regional organizations.

Much work remains to be done by the Central American states themselves on what, for example, was actually meant by the democratization, amnesty and free-election provisions of the Esquipulas II agreement. Needless to say, the distance several regimes were prepared to go fell far short of the expectations held by hopeful circles watching the Central American scene from abroad. At a minimum a real national dialogue must be allowed among all legitimate unarmed political groupings. At a maximum, this dialogue could be extended to amnestied or even still resisting groups. The verification of the holding of, and the real openings involved in, those dialogues, would be difficult and extremely delicate. It is a political, not a military requirement, and means that any overall verification effort must include civilian as well as military personnel if its goals are to be brought into the realm of possible attainment. In all of this, the CIVS experience underscores the need for caution and a limit to excessive hopes of rapid and smooth progress. Nonetheless, the CIVS initiative, while criticized by all for incompleteness and by some for bias, was partially successful in demonstrating that such complicated political verification of the Esquipulas II agreement was indeed possible.⁶

The inclusion of the United States will necessitate the closest of verification of any Nicaraguan national dialogue, amnesty and free election provisions. Washington has severely criticized Managua for "bad faith" in its approach to a real dialogue with opposition elements. It has accused the Sandinistas of using the negotiations as a whole as a means of fooling world