
Technical Considerations

The complicating factors for an accord's verification and sustenance are all very real considerations for those working on Central American peace. They, and perhaps even more so the terrain and climatic factors discussed, will affect greatly a number of the elements of any verification regime. There is no doubt that the complexities and difficulties involved will require a multi-dimensional verification system that makes maximum use of high technology and other technical means to supplement the work of personnel on the ground. While technical means may not prove so necessary in the case of "political" verification, they will be essential for verifying security provisions of any agreement. And these security provisions will have their political impact. Nor should one be overly certain of the costs of replacing manpower with technology. The development and deployment of sophisticated technical means of verification can be extremely expensive and, while no doubt helpful in many areas, may not be cost-effective in others.

The areas of general applicability to verification regimes brought out in Dr. Brian Mandell's recent Sinai paper can be used to suggest the areas of technical challenge that need to be addressed.⁹ Thus, the next sections look at area coverage; detection, discrimination and sensors; communications and reporting; control; ease of operation and maintenance; data preservation and distribution; and false alarm visits.

Area Coverage

The vast areas and difficult terrain conditions involved in the Honduran/Nicaraguan and Salvadorean/Honduran border regions — without considering those of Costa Rica/Nicaragua, El Salvador/Guatemala, and Guatemala/Mexico — pose a major verification problem in terms of area coverage. Many tens of thousands of square kilometres of mountainous and frequently forested land are of concern here, as well as huge lakes, long rivers, wide air spaces, and so on. The inhospitable and inaccessible nature of these areas will mean that a verification region will ideally, and indeed must, depend on a mix of flexible, mobile and light inspection/observer teams backed up by higher technology machinery which could perhaps take some of the otherwise impossible burden off the personnel resources available.

In any case a large force will be needed on the ground for the reasons mentioned above and related to the scope and dispersal of the likely jobs of verification to be done. However, to keep this force from reaching tremendous proportions, technology could conceivably provide some of the answers. Ideally, satellite and reconnaissance aircraft overflights would help immensely. They would be supplemented by a variety of ground and probably sea-based sensors