

## Nicaragua Destroys SAM-7 Missiles

**Regional balance of power is the stated goal, but US pressure plays a role**

Citing a commitment to regional disarmament, Nicaragua destroyed a second batch of 333 Soviet-made SAM-7 missiles on July of this year. If a third batch is destroyed as planned in November, the country will have eliminated about half of its stock of 2,100 weapons of this type, acquired by the Sandinista government in the 1980s.

According to the chief of operations of the Nicaraguan Army, Ramón Humberto Calderón, the goal of the arms reduction is to "reach a reasonable balance of power in the Central American region."

Defense Minister José Adán Guerra described the unilateral initiative as "an indication of the government of Nicaragua's commitment to peace and regional and hemispheric security."

The secretary general of the Central American Integration System (SICA), Oscar Santamaría, observed the controlled detonation and invited other countries in the region "to follow the example of Nicaragua," although he acknowledged that none have presented a similar plan so far.

Officials from the US State Department also attended, leading to charges in the local press that US pressure was responsible for the decision of President Enrique Bolaños to reduce Nicaragua's arsenal. The US has made it clear that it is concerned about the proliferation of shoulder-fired surface to air missiles, which were used in a terrorist attempt to shoot down an Israeli passenger plane in Kenya in 2002.

US and Nicaraguan officials rejected the allegations of US influence and the suggestion that US military aid to Nicaragua is linked to the missiles' destruction.

During a November 2003 trip to Nicaragua, Secretary of State Colin Powell argued that the missiles "are not weapons needed for any kind of regional balance and certainly not for the security of Nicaragua." He added, "the Nicaraguan people and the people in the other nations in Central American should be more worried about narco trafficking and terrorists than they should be about being invaded by a neighbor."

Just days following Powell's visit, Nicaragua's *La Prensa* newspaper published allegations that Colombia's FARC insurgents had expressed interest in purchasing the Nicaraguan missiles, for a price of up to one million dollars each.

Sources: La Prensa (Nicaragua), [www.laprensa.com.ni](http://www.laprensa.com.ni); US State Department, <http://usinfo.state.gov>.

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