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Do Belizeans Even Trespass On Guatemalan Territory?

Thu, June 27, 2013



Last night, we showed you the confidence building exercise which the OAS held to improve the relationship between the Belize Defence Force and the Guatemalan Military.

But, in an environment where high-powered weapons are always at a quick draw, it takes quite a lot for cooler heads to

prevail.

We spoke to the BDF commander, and we asked about Belizean incursions into Guatemalan territory, since only the opposite makes the news.

He told us that to his knowledge, Belizeans have respected the Guatemalan territory:

Lt. Col. David Jones - Commander, BDF



Lt. Col. David Jones

"It is very important because incidents happen on either side of the border and verification needs to take place so if something happens in Belize and we can share information with the Guatemalans, if it affects their citizens we get in contact with them and we meet with them along the border, we exchange information and then we help each other. Because what we do on a quarterly basis, we meet with the Guatemalan arm forces, sometimes right here at this building, sometimes inside Belize, sometimes over in Guatemala and every quarterly we sit down; we discuss all the incidents that have occurred either in the Chiquibul Forest reserve

in Belize or any where inside Belize or inside Guatemala where incidents affect both countries. We sit down, we discuss it and as professionals we try to solve our issues as soldiers, at the diplomatic and political level, that is different, but we as soldiers, work together as professionals."

And he also spoke on the fact that besides the relationship building at the diplomatic level, BDF and the Guatemalan Security Force do their own confidence building.

Lt. Col. David Jones

"Well we haven't been hearing of any incidents of Belizeans being caught over on the Guatemalan

side. It's vice versa, it's mainly only Guatemalans have been caught doing illegal activities in Belize which is why the BDF and other agencies like FCD Forestry have always been encountering them and hence the reasons why they've had shooting incidents between Guatemalan civilians and Belize Defense Force soldiers because they are the ones that have been caught over here. There have been no incidents of Guatemalans having to encounter our Belizean citizens on the Guatemalan side"

Reporter

"From your point of view, how are your team set up to defuse situations as such? What steps do you have in place for your officers?"

Lt. Col. David Jones

"Well when soldiers are working along the border - first of all they think about protection of their lives because when Guatemalans are operating inside Belize they are looking after their personal livelihood. Sometimes they would protect it with their lives but when it comes to close encounters with BDF and Guatemalans civilians, we try to talk to them initially - we try to ensure that there is a level of escalation of force before it ends into something fatal so when we talk to them and they respond aggressively then the soldiers of course will take out their weapon and try to respond in time. In the past we've had three fatalities last year, we had a shooting incident just a few weeks ago where a Guatemalan was shot by the Belize Defense Force soldier. When those incidents happen we try to talk to them but when they respond by shooting at the soldiers we will respond in kind. The soldiers will have to defend themselves; there will be incidences where if we can, we try and disarm them but if it is such a dangerous situation where we cannot disarm them, then we would have to respond with deadly force."

Reporter

"We are trying to get some information from the Guatemalans but could you comment on their policy on deadly use of force to neutralized threats in such Belizeans especially if Belizeans were going armed into their lands"

Lt. Col. David Jones

"Well they would be similarly like us, if anyone is breaching the laws inside of Guatemala, there is a level of escalation of force that you try to use. If you can disarm someone you do it but if someone fires a weapon at you, using deadly force against you, you have to respond in kind so similarly the Guatemalan arm forces, if our civilians would be over there and they would shoot at the Guatemalan military they would respond in kind, it would be the same as for us"

We attempted to pose these questions to the Guatemalan Commander, but the OAS representative thought that it would escalate tensions, which we didn't want to do.

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