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Regional Notes: Americas

El Salvador: Narcotics Agreement Likely To Pass Legislative Hurdle

President Flores is likely to overcome opposition to establishing a US-operated counternarcotics forward operating location (FOL) and secure legislative approval for the measure as early as next week. Many Salvadorans view narcotics trafficking as driving the nation's high crime rates, suggesting Flores will try to sell the agreement as an anticrime measure.

- Passage requires a simple majority in the Assembly. Flores's ruling National Republican Alliance and the right-wing National Conciliation Party control 39 of the necessary 43 votes.--*The voting records of the Assembly's small parties--which control 16 seats--suggest Flores can count on the support of at least four additional deputies.* 

The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Liberal Democratic Party control 29 votes and are opposed to the FOL agreement but lack the votes necessary to block the measure alone. *The FMLN is trying to frame the debate as a sovereignty issue, which could undermine support, especially if the US downgrades the safety status of El Salvador's international airport and air services before the vote.* 

El Salvador: FOL Site Will Improve Interdiction Efforts

A forward operating location (FOL) site in El Salvador will improve air and maritime interdiction efforts against Colombian traffickers who last year moved logistic rendezvous areas further offshore and developed routes farther out in the Pacific using long-range and super long-range go-fast boats to transport multiton quantities of cocaine through the Central America transit zone to Mexico.

- The US abandoned efforts to establish an FOL in Honduras after climate, altitude, and terrain factors ruled out Soto Cano Airbase as a site.
- Political challenges forced Costa Rican President Rodriguez to postpone indefinitely an FOL