

11-4-2004

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### Recommended Citation

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## Central America Sends Troops to Haiti

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Central America

Published: 2004-11-04

Several Central American chiefs of state, meeting in mid-October, discussed sending 500 troops to Haiti as a contribution to the UN peacekeeping mission there (see NotiCen, 2004-06-03). The presidents met in Nicaragua at the behest of besieged President Enrique Bolanos, who sought and got their support in fending off his possible impeachment.

President Antonio Saca of El Salvador, in a news conference following the meeting, said, "We are seriously considering sending an integrated Central American force with soldiers from each of the countries." He offered no more details at the time, saying it was too early to do so. Back in El Salvador the next day, however, the idea won the approval of Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador Gregorio Rosa Chavez, who had strongly opposed sending troops to Iraq. El Salvador is alone among the region's nations to continue to have troops in Iraq.

The other countries that would send troops are Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, all members of the Conferencia de las Fuerzas Armadas de Centroamerica (CFAC). Lacking armies, Costa Rica and Panama participate neither in CFAC nor in the Haiti expedition.

A week after the Nicaragua meeting, Saca again spoke to the media, this time to inform them that the plan was still on, but that "the decision of the Central American presidents a week ago in Managua was that we should await the report of the armed forces high commands; they will send those reports to the defense ministers." The ministers would then send the presidents a proposal for the joint force. He said, "Historically we have demonstrated that we support this peace force, because this country received help in its moment of need. The armed forces have a contingent ready, according to the information we have."

### *Nicaragua different*

Nicaragua, which could also be said to have received help in its moment of need, announced through Defense Minister Jose Adan Guerra that it still had not decided to send troops, but he did let slip that the request had come from the UN. It did not originate at the Bolanos defense meeting. Guerra said he had not spoken to Bolanos about the troop envoy, but he expected to do so soon. Guerra said that Nicaragua has a "dynamic a little different" from the other countries, which by Oct. 23 had all signed on to the joint force. "There are countries in Central America, like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, that are more advanced in preparations for the sending of troops. We would have to meet with President Bolanos, establish the guidelines for sending the troops, and talk to the deputies of the Asamblea Nacional to explain to them the reasons for the presence of Nicaragua in Haiti," he explained.

Guerra seemed in no great hurry. He had no date for a meeting with Bolanos, and, as for the rest, "We will make the requests involved in this when the time comes." Beyond the internal formalities,

rolls, missions, times, and numbers would have to be worked out with the other armies, since the force would arrive in Haiti under a regional, rather than national, banner and with UN financing. As Guerra dithered, the rest of CFAC went crisply about the business of logistics in a military manner.

Scant days after the Nicaraguan spoke to the press of complexities and intricacies, Honduran Defense Minister Federico Breve had already consulted with his homologues in El Salvador and Guatemala, said armed forces spokesman Col. Rafael Moreno Coello, and stood ready to go to Nicaragua to secure their participation as soon as an invitation appeared. Presidential problems But in Honduras, too, there were presidential problems. As in Nicaragua, President Ricardo Maduro must get legislative approval to send troops abroad. But Maduro is in the midst of crises. His attorney general fired ten prosecutors because they protested his order to close the files on a number of corruption cases; a national transport strike over rate hikes was about to start; and the population was growing restless over fuel prices and rises in the prices of basic commodities.

Notwithstanding these contingencies, on Nov. 2, in El Salvador, the joint chiefs of staff there announced the departure the next day of a Salvadoran military delegation to Haiti, to evaluate the conditions on the ground with Haitian and UN authorities. Some time after their return, a joint Central American force of perhaps 500 soldiers will set out for Haiti to help calm the crisis there and return the country to a functioning one.

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