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Nicaraguan Vice President Ramirez On Failure Of Reagan's "project" & New Opportunity For Regional Peace Agreement

by Deborah Tyroler

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In a recent interview with Cuban news agency PRENSA LATINA (broadcast 05/26/87) in Mexico City, Nicaraguan Vice President Sergio Ramirez stated that in his view genuine possibilities for peace negotiations in Central America will remain effectively stalemated as long as the United States remains committed to the idea of defeating the Sandinista government by military means. Ramirez was visiting Mexico City, and had met with Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid the previous week. The vice president said he was generally pessimistic about prospects for peace in the region. He mentioned that Central American governments are under a variety of pressures to acquiesce to US policy preferences. Included here, said Ramirez, are political and economic "blackmail," the presence of military bases in the region, and almost continual joint war games. Ramirez noted that his government has "always insisted that the feasibility of any peace negotiations in Central America depends on US willingness to agree with the same...It is important to state this so as not to indulge in political pipe dreams about the sheer honesty of a [peace] plan being able to make it a feasible one." Next, the Sandinista official said proposals presented by a Central American government or the attitude expressed by a given government are evidence of "possible accommodations" toward reaching future solutions. In this regard, he mentioned that the Sandinista government is cautious about expressing broad-based support for the peace plan initiated by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias. The Costa Rican government, said Ramirez, is subject to US pressures and "we must be aware" that these pressures will continue. "The Arias proposal emerges as a result of...concrete circumstances. First, it comes when the counter-revolution is already seen as a defeated military project..., and second, because recognition of the defeat of that...project was sparked by an internal crisis in the United States," said Ramirez. "This crisis, seen in the Irangate or Conragate (scandal), has not emerged because the congressional establishment suddenly realized that [National Security Council aid Lt. Col. Oliver] North and others were trampling on important values. After all, the US Congress approved [in 1986] \$100 million in aid for the counter-revolutionaries. "Rather, the crisis comes at a time when it is clear the Reagan project for the contras [defeating the Sandinistas] has failed, and so [the Congress] has begun to settle accounts with him because of his failures...All would be different if the counter-revolutionaries had experienced some measure of victory, that is, having occupied five or six towns in Nicaragua, one-third or half of Nicaraguan territory under contra military control, and a provisional government established inside Nicaragua, just as the Reagan administration dreamed of. "Under such circumstances nobody would be settling accounts with Reagan, and Oliver North would be the greatest strategist known on how to defeat a communist government in the 'empire's rib cage,' instead of his present bad guy image." Ramirez continued as follows: "Thus, the counter-revolutionaries' military defeat and the failure of Reagan's political project constitute the axis of the scandal in the United States and [the cause for] a certain flexibility which is beginning to be observable among Central American governments. "The Arias proposal would not have been possible two years ago when the US could continually impose the idea of a military solution...An

opportune time has developed to seek a negotiated alternative, and the Arias proposal is part of this, since the Central American governments begin to see that a military solution is not possible. "Meanwhile, other forces seeking diplomatic negotiations have become strengthened in the United States, both within the Democratic Party and other non-party pressure groups." Ramirez stated that his government has not evaluated the Arias plan in negative terms. "We agree with any proposal seeking a negotiated instead of a military solution, although there are details to be discussed [later]...We would have to examine...what is and is not feasible in that proposal, but we think it is grounded on some perspectives we share." Significant points of agreement on which to begin "discussing a peace proposal," said Ramirez, include: the "famous redemocratization systems" cannot be imposed on Central American countries; each country's domestic legislation must be respected; each country's political self-determination must be respect; and, talks with the armed contras cannot be imposed on the Sandinista government. On the upcoming Central American summit to take place in Esquipulas, Guatemala, Ramirez said: "The Esquipulas meeting is precisely part of the context mentioned previously. The Arias proposal will be discussed, but more important, an open discussion such as the one in May last year, will take place among the presidents. That open discussion is more important this year since the rules of the game are known, and people can talk more frankly... "Common sense indicates that the Central American presidents are now somewhat less willing to continue pushing the cart of the Reagan project because this cart is either missing a wheel, or has a broken axle. Doing otherwise would meaning joining in a doomed venture. Therefore, these governments now have the opportunity to begin searching for a negotiated solution. "I repeat, as long as the Yankee will is against it, making such a solution feasible seems difficult to me, but it does not mean we should not try...We should attempt it through all the Central American governments and under the umbrella of the Contadora Group."

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