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Deborah Tyroler

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Summary: Diplomatic Efforts Underway To Salvage Central American Summit

by Deborah Tyroler

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Twelve days before the Central American summit to discuss Costa Rican President Oscar Arias's peace plan, Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte requested a postponement, on grounds that respective governments needed more time to prepare. Specifically, Duarte indicated that the five foreign ministers should meet at least three times before the presidents convene. Since then, diplomats have tentatively scheduled the summit for August 7-8. The Nicaraguan government, however, has rejected the postponement, charging that it was instigated by the United States as part of an effort to change the peace plan. The US, Salvadoran and Costa Rican governments have issued official denials that Washington applied pressure on its Central American allies to delay the summit meeting. The Costa Rican plan calls for cease-fires between Central American governments and insurgents, an end to all foreign military aid to insurgencies including the contras and a timetable for "democratization" in Nicaragua. Washington's major objection to the plan is that it would cut off aid to the contras while leaving the Sandinistas in power and free of pressure. Responses to Nicaragua's refusal to consider a postponement have been predictable. The US State Department has expressed "disappointment," urging Managua to reconsider neighboring governments' valid claims. Last week Costa Rican Foreign Minister Rodrigo Madrigal told reporters that Nicaragua "lacks the will to build peace." Honduran President Jose Azcona Hoyo suggested that the foreign ministers could meet without the presence of Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto.

June 18: Costa Rican Foreign Minister Madrigal claimed that the Costa Rican plan differed from US objectives in the region only in form and not in substance. At an evening press conference, after returning from a four-day visit in the United States, President Arias stated that the Reagan administration believes military pressure is necessary to "persuade" Managua to negotiate a solution to the regional conflict. "On this matter," he said, "we disagree." [According to diplomatic sources, a recent meeting between US presidential envoy Philip Habib and the president in San Jose went badly when Arias flatly rejected entreaties that the plan be amended to include a call for negotiations between the Sandinista government and the contras.] According to Arias, he has never been pressured by Washington on his foreign policy, nor has the Reagan administration made economic assistance conditional on his government's policy toward Central American neighbors. "I categorically deny it. I could never accept that." The Costa Rican leader said that although in principle he did not support postponement of the summit, he had accepted the will of a majority of Central American governments. Arias claimed that through his Guatemalan counterpart Vinicio Cerezo, he would try and persuade President Ortega that he should attend the August summit.

June 21: Guatemalan Foreign Minister Mario Quinonez announced that his government would continue to "insist on and struggle for" realization of a summit in Guatemala to discuss the Costa Rican peace plan. He said Guatemala considers as valid both the attitudes of Presidents Duarte and Ortega on the summit issue. "As long as good will exists," said Quinones, "there is yet sufficient time to seek an agreement among all parties." June 20: The Guatemalan government announced that Foreign Minister Quinonez would not attend pre-summit preparations at the ministerial level that exclude Nicaraguan participation. The Guatemalan decision was revealed via a report by the Honduran

Foreign Ministry. Tegucigalpa was to host a foreign minister conclave late the following week. June 22: In an interview with foreign reporters, Panamanian Foreign Minister Jorge Abadia mentioned the "coincidence" of Duarte's request for postponing the summit and his recent meeting with US presidential envoy Philip Habib. Guatemalan Foreign Minister Quinones said Guatemala City may seek mediation by the Contadora Group (Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela) in resolving problems of summit scheduling. June 23: According to local press reports, Panamanian President Eric Arturo del Valle and Nicaraguan counterpart Daniel Ortega will meet in the Panama City June 24 to discuss potential alternatives to break the stalemate on scheduling the summit and foreign minister meetings. The invitation was extended by del Valle, and Ortega reportedly confirmed acceptance in a telephone conversation on the evening of June 22. (Basic data from Agence France Presse, Voz de Nicaragua and Prensa Latina)

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