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Summary Of Nicaraguan Cease-fire Talk Proceedings, April 13-19

by Deborah Tyroler

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April 13: After a series of contacts between Managua and the contras' office in Miami, the Nicaraguan government agreed to send its military delegation headed by Maj. Gen. Joaquin Cuadra to Sapoa at mid-day on April 14 to resume discussions about procedures for relocating contra fighters in cease-fire zones. Next, the contras agreed to travel to Managua on April 15 regardless of whether respective delegations finished defining the zones in Sapoa by late Thursday. If no agreement was reached at that time, the zones would be taken up in Managua by the higher-level delegations. The contra military delegation in Sapoa reportedly "simplified" its cease-fire zone proposal. They had demanded to be allowed to restock weapons and ammunition used up in defensive operations and exercises before and during their stay in the zones. They also said the government should terminate receipt of Soviet bloc military aid during the two-month truce. Government officials called these demands "absurd." Some demands were removed from the contras' previous 34-point proposal, and contra leaders said the higher-level delegation would raise them in Managua. The two sides also compromised on the logistics of the Managua meeting. Contra leaders had indicated that they wished to meet with a series of political opposition groups in Managua. President Daniel Ortega's administration refused, citing security concerns, as well as the inacceptability of permitting representatives of an armed force dedicating to overthrowing the government free reign to organize in the capital. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Hugo Tinoco, "In no country in the world is an armed group allowed to conduct a political campaign." The government then issued authorization for two meetings, one at the offices of La Prensa, and one with the National Bishops Conference. The contras are to stay at the Camino Real Hotel on the outskirts of Managua, where they will meet with government delegates. April 14: Both sides in Sapoa said that only three or four points were left to discuss in order to complete an agreement about the zones. The discussion involves arranging for the delivery of US aid in Nicaragua. April 15: A contra delegation, comprised of 45 people, arrived in Managua from Costa Rica to begin talks toward implementing a permanent cease-fire. The delegation is led by the five-member contra directorate. April 17: Nicaraguan government negotiators presented a proposal calling on the contras to disarm by June 20, which was rejected by the contras. A member of the contra directorate, Alfredo Cesar, said the contras would not sign any accord that did not include a commitment to political change. Under the Nicaraguan government's proposal, contras would withdraw into seven cease-fire zones by April 26 and start the process of disarming at the beginning of June. In the interim, they would be permitted to receive food, medicine and clothing through the International Red Cross. Since the Red Cross has worked closely with the government, the contras said they do not trust the organization. Deputy Foreign Minister Tinoco said, "We were surprised by their reaction. They were really scandalized that we made an offer for a permanent cease-fire." In addition to the disarmament initiative, the government proposal offered the common points from both sides' proposals for the cease-fire zones, added several other clauses spelling out procedures for steps already agreed to in the Sapoa accord, and begins with a preamble in which both parties would commit themselves to "a total and definitive end to the war." Under the Sapoa

accord, the government also agreed to a gradual release of all political prisoners and to assure freedom of expression. "We are interested in getting a formal ratification from them they are ready to disarm," Tinoco said. "If not, this is just a truce to give them a rest." A temporary truce has been in effect since March 21. According to Tinoco, the government is not willing to proceed with further negotiations or steps under the Sapoa accord until the contras sign a disarmament agreement. Government spokespersons have said that the contras would be permitted to take up their political demands when their representatives join the political dialogue currently underway between the government and internal political groups. "They can't expect the government to have two political dialogues going at the same time," Tinoco said. During a morning press conference, Gen. Humberto Ortega said he thought only "abject reactionary" sectors of the Reagan administration were opposed to the cease-fire process in Nicaragua. He said the contras want a settlement because they are militarily weak. "They lost the war in a strict military sense a long time ago," Ortega said. April 18: Although the two sides had not yet reached any type of agreement toward establishing a definitive cease-fire, Nicaraguan Defense Minister Humberto Ortega, head of the government delegation, said the deliberations were thus far positive. Ortega said the negotiations would be resumed on April 28-30 in Managua. US attorney Paul Reichler, an adviser to the Nicaraguan government during the cease-fire talks, told foreign correspondents that the Nicaraguan Resistance directorate is being pressured by top contra military commander, Enrique Bermudez, to avoid signing an accord. April 18: At a rally in Managua on Monday evening, President Daniel Ortega said that if the contras do not comply with the March 23 Sapoa truce provisions, the government will resume fighting them until they are totally liquidated. If the contras break off negotiations in late April, or fail to attend, he said, Nicaraguans will have no other choice but to continue the fight until realizing a military victory. April 19: Spokespersons for both sides told reporters that they have decided to declare themselves in "permanent session," and will return to Managua for meetings on April 28. (Basic data from several reports, AP, Washington Post, Prensa Latina, New York Times, AFP)

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