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Nicaraguan Contra Delegation In Managua; Third Round Of Permanent Ceasefire Talks Underway

by Deborah Tyroler

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On May 25, contra spokesperson Marta Sacasa told the New York Times that the contras had withdrawn their earlier refusal to attend a third round of peace negotiations in Managua. Sacasa also said that the contras are expected to offer a permanent ceasefire by Sept. 1 if the Nicaraguan government agrees to sweeping political changes. Both sides have agreed to extend the current ceasefire which expires on May 31. Sacasa told the Times that the contra delegation would include contra military commander-in-chief Enrique Bermudez. Bermudez did not participate in the March 23 Sapoa accords, nor in later face-to-face negotiations between the two sides. On May 24, contra leaders, including Alfredo Cesar who is to head the contra delegation, met with State Department officials and congressional leaders in Washington. In reference to acrimonious exchanges between the two sides in recent weeks, Deputy Foreign Minister Hugo Tinoco said, "This is a very polarized society. I am sure the debate between Bush and Dukakis would be much more bitter if they were separated by 50,000 deaths." Despite the presence of Bermudez at the third round of talks, some Nicaraguans are hopeful about the eventual outcome. Bermudez has expressed opposition to the original accords established in Sapoa. According to Jaime Wheelock, member of the Sandinista National Directorate and Minister of Agriculture, "There is a certain dynamic that takes hold when you sit down and begin to talk about stopping the killing. The realization that we are all Nicaraguans, and that it doesn't make sense to keep killing each other, becomes stronger and stronger." Eli Altamirano, leader of the Communist Party, was cited by the Times as saying: "Having Bermudez here is an opportunity, not a threat to the process. Any accord he signs is going to be carried out." The contra delegation arrived in Managua on May 25, and talks were reportedly underway on Thursday. In contrast to past visits in Managua, this time the contra delegation will meet with several opposition groups in the capital city. (Basic data from AP, New York Times, 05/26/88)

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