

9-14-1988

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Nicaragua Suggests Preliminary Meeting With Contras In Guatemala; Contras Not Interested

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, September 14, 1988

On the evening of Sept. 9 during a speech in Managua, President Daniel Ortega said he was willing to send a delegation to Guatemala to meet with the contras on Sept. 18 and 19. The delegation, he said, would be headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Victor Hugo Tinoco. Meanwhile, contra spokesperson Bosco Matamoros said the contras were not likely to accept the Nicaraguan government's proposals. He stated that Ortega's announcement was timed to impress the US Congress currently considering new contra aid. One of the disputes holding up the resumption of peace talks concerns location. Contra leaders have insisted that they will not return to Managua, where previous rounds were held. Ortega said the objective of the meeting in Guatemala would be "to talk with a delegation of contras about a future meeting in Managua and to hear their concerns, their fears about coming to Managua." In a telephone interview with the New York Times, Matamoros said from Washington that there was no point in discussing the prospect of talks in Managua, and that it was "very unlikely" the contras would send a delegation to Guatemala. The contras have suggested that opposition parties in Nicaragua be invited to participate in future talks, and have insisted on the presidents of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica serving as guarantors of any agreement reached. The Nicaraguan government has not accepted either proposal. In his speech, Ortega said Central American presidents had agreed in principle to hold a summit meeting at the end of October. President Cerezo of Guatemala has been promoting such a meeting. Honduran President Jose Azcona said he would not attend a summit meeting unless Nicaragua withdrew its case against Honduras in the International Court of Justice in the Hague, where it has charged that Honduran authorities are sheltering contra troops. Recently, Azcona has apparently softened his position on this matter. Some diplomats have said that the presidents wish to meet before Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte, who has cancer, is incapacitated. Ortega's overture was in part the result of mediation efforts by Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo. The preliminary talks would precede formal peace discussions to be held in mid-October. Managua's suggestion has been rejected by the so-called "hardline" contra faction headed by Enrique Bermudez. Meanwhile, the faction represented by Alfredo Cesar is reportedly interested in meeting with Nicaraguan representatives in Guatemala. (Basic data from New York Times, 09/11/88; Prensa Latina, 09/12/88)

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