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Nicaragua: Review Of Peace Process, Compliance With Regional Accord

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The Nicaraguan government and the contras have been at war for the past seven years. In addition to more than 50,000 dead and wounded, the war has directly or indirectly caused over \$3 billion in material damages. The passage of Hurricane Joan in late October resulted in another estimated \$2 billion in direct material damage to the nation's natural resources, crops and livestock, and social and economic infrastructure. Despite a putative cease-fire early April this year, sporadic clashes between soldiers and contra units have continued, as well as contra attacks on civilians. At present, the Nicaraguan government and contra leaders appear to be waiting for the installation of George Bush's administration to determine the potential for negotiating a permanent truce. For Nicaragua, a permanent ceasefire is essential toward beginning the herculean task of economic reconstruction. (Some economists predict that even in the unlikely event that Nicaragua receives unprecedented levels of foreign assistance, reconstruction to repair the damage inflicted on the economy during the past seven years, much less any appreciable improvements, would require 15 to 20 years of concerted effort.) The "peace process" or attempts to resolve Nicaragua's military conflict have been underway since 1982. The most promising of these initiatives have been sponsored or supported by Latin American governments, the United Nations and the Organization of American States. The most important of these initiatives and related developments are summarized below in Section 1. Section 2 provides a summary of Nicaraguan compliance with the regional peace accord signed in August 1987. The summaries are presented in the spirit of reviewing recent history with an eye to predicting and preparing for new developments in the peace process following George Bush's inauguration. Next, this review is not presented as comprehensive in the sense of covering all major actors, actions, policies and interests in the Nicaraguan conflict. Instead, it focuses almost exclusively on Nicaraguan and Latin American initiatives, and the major dates, events and proposals linked to the same. * On January 8-9, 1983, foreign ministers from Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela met on the island of Contadora (Panama) to discuss the Central American crisis, among other topics of mutual concern. Henceforth, the four nations as peacemakers in the sub-region became known as the Contadora Group. In its first initiative, Contadora offered to mediate border conflicts between Honduras and Nicaragua, and Nicaragua and Costa Rica. * Following a two-day meeting on July 18, Contadora nation presidents issued a joint peace proposal which included the following points: creation of demilitarized zones; prohibition of foreign military installations and advisers in Central America; ban on the use of Central American territory to carry out political, military or other actions destined at destabilizing governments of other nations; ban on arms trafficking; freeze on offensive weapons acquisition; initiation of talks on arms control and reduction; establishment of joint border patrols and international supervision of such patrols; and, creation of security commissions to prevent and resolve border disputes. * On July 19, the Nicaraguan government announced its acceptance of multilateral conflict negotiation. Previously, Managua had stated that only bilateral negotiations with the United States were appropriate for resolving border tensions and ending contra attacks. At this time, the government offered its own suggestions for regional peace: ban on foreign assistance to all paramilitary forces, and on foreign

military bases and exercises; a Nicaraguan-Honduran nonaggression pact; non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states; termination of economic pressure on all nations in the region; and, supervision of agreement compliance by the United Nations Security Council and the Contadora Group. * On the following day, July 20, the Nicaraguan government announced it was prepared to accept all proposals put forth by Contadora, and offered to immediately sign a memorandum of understanding. On July 21, the Honduran government rejected the possibility of a non-aggression pact with Nicaragua. * In early September, 1983, the Contadora Group convened in Panama City to discuss a 10-point peace plan. The plan was rejected by Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica on the ground that any peace initiative must include commitments to domestic democratic political institutions. * In October, Contadora presented a revised draft to the United Nations containing a section on political democratization and respect for human rights. At this time, Nicaragua proposed bilateral treaties with the United States and Honduras, and a multilateral treaty for all of Central America. No reference was made by Managua regarding democratic and pluralist regimes in Central America. The United States then added a new condition for regional peace proposals: amnesty for all imprisoned political opponents. * In early 1984, it appeared that border tensions between Nicaragua its northern and southern neighbors were deescalating. Then, on April 25, Nicaragua denounced to the Organization of American States the mining of its three main harbors by the CIA. * By the second half of the year, Managua had adopted a rigid position on peace negotiations in response to an escalation in the contra war. The government declared that it would not accept commitments of any kind as long as the war continued. * In June, the first of nine rounds of talks between the United States and Nicaragua took place. Meanwhile, the US continued providing military aid to the contras. * Managua announced in September that it was prepared to sign the Contadora peace accord without preconditions. The draft plan included democratization commitments such as freedom of speech, and holding free and competitive elections. * On October 15, US allies in the region (El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica) convened in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and issued a joint statement summarizing objections to the accord. The three nations became known as the Tegucigalpa Bloc. * On December 11, US and Nicaraguan representatives met in Manzanillo, Mexico, for the ninth round of talks. In January 1985 the talks were declared to have reached an impasse and were suspended. * In early 1985, a new diplomatic offensive by the Contadora Group toward resuming debate among the Central American nations failed. In February, the Tegucigalpa Bloc nations refused to participate in any future Contadora meetings. By this time, the Nicaraguan government had adopted a position stating that a bilateral agreement with the US was necessary prior to implementation of a Contadora regional accord. To demonstrate its good faith, Managua offered to send 100 Cuban military advisers home, and to unilaterally cease the acquisition of new weapons if the US would agree to resume bilateral talks. * In April, the US offered its own peace plan stating that contra military aid would be halted if the Nicaraguan government agreed to negotiate with the contras. Managua refused to negotiate with the contras, described as US-backed mercenaries. The Reagan administration then imposed a full economic embargo on Nicaragua in May. * On June 28, 1985, four of South America's most influential nations Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay established the Contadora Support Group. Bolstered by the added Latin American backing and gestures of support from numerous Third World and Western European nations, in July Contadora publicly called on the US to resume negotiations with Nicaragua. * During the fall of 1985, Contadora presented a third draft of a peace agreement to the five Central American nations. Objections to agreement provisions were presented by all parties. In December, Contadora negotiations were suspended for five months. * On January 12, 1986, Contadora foreign ministers convened in Caraballeda, Venezuela, and issued a declaration

stating that they were prepared to redouble their efforts in the peace process. The principal bases for a new peace effort as defined in the declaration were: signing the peace accord; halting support for irregular and insurrectional forces; suspension of military maneuvers; reduction and elimination of foreign military advisers and foreign military bases in Central America; commitment to non-aggression among Central American nations by means of unilateral declarations; and, promotion of international cooperation to resolve economic and social problems in the region. Three days later, several Latin American presidents issued a joint statement in Guatemala City declaring support for the Caraballeda statement, and for a proposal by Guatemala's new president, Vinicio Cerezo, toward establishing a Central American Parliament. * On May 24-25, the five Central American presidents met in Guatemala (Esquipulas I) to discuss the formation of the regional parliament. The heads of state, including Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, reiterated their commitment to the goals of the Contadora process. * In July 1986, UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar issued a report on Central America citing pluralistic democracy and non-intervention by outside forces as fundamental preconditions for peace. In September, Perez de Cuellar announced his approval of plans for implementing a peacekeeping force on Nicaraguan borders. * In November, both Secretary Perez de Cuellar and OAS Secretary General Joao Baena Soares offered numerous services their institutions could provide to facilitate the Contadora process, including the establishment of border patrols, monitoring armed forces reductions or the dissolution of irregular forces, verifying international military maneuvers and withdrawal of military advisers, verifying complaints of human rights abuses and coordinating economic assistance. * Following a meeting in Rio de Janeiro, in January 1987 the foreign ministers of the Contadora Group and its Support Group launched a diplomatic offensive in Central America with the participation of the UN and OAS secretaries general. On February 15 in San Jose, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias presented a peace plan he had developed over the past several months to his counterparts from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Nicaraguan President Ortega was not invited. * On Aug. 5, 1987, two days before a Central American summit in Guatemala, President Reagan and Speaker of the House of Representatives Jim Wright reached agreement on a six-point plan for a regional peace accord. It recommended an immediate cease-fire, a simultaneous suspension of US aid to the contras and Soviet-bloc assistance to the Sandinistas, direct negotiations between the Nicaraguan government and the contras, withdrawal of foreign military advisers from Nicaragua, national reconciliation, democratization, and respect for basic human and political rights in Nicaragua. The US deadline for reaching a cease-fire was September 30. * On August 7, the presidents of the five Central American countries convened in Guatemala City and signed the "Central American Peace Agreement," also known as the Guatemalan Accord, Esquipulas II, and the Arias Peace Plan. Major provisions of the agreement included national reconciliation, cease-fire, amnesty, democratization, an end to aid for insurgent movements and free elections.

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