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Nicaraguan Contras' Proposals For Resuming Peace Talks: Summary Of Events, Statements

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Dec. 26: Nicaraguan newspaper El Nuevo Diario reported that members of the contra umbrella organization, the Nicaraguan Resistance (RN), planned to present a peace proposal to the government in January. According to the newspaper, the contras sent a letter to Deputy Foreign Minister Victor Hugo Tinoco on Dec. 26 asking for an interview Jan. 2 to present the plan. A spokesperson at the RN headquarters in Miami denied the report. El Nuevo Diario reported that the letter was signed by contra leaders Alfredo Cesar and Roberto Urroz, members of the coalition's moderate wing. The report did not give details of the plan. Dec. 29: In San Jose, Costa Rica, senior contra leaders said they were prepared to travel to Managua on Jan. 4 to deliver a new peace proposal to the Nicaraguan government. Jose Davila, who heads a five-organization rebel umbrella group called the Democratic Center Coalition (CCD), said the CCD leaders also planned to deliver their proposal to the presidents of other Central American governments. A Central American summit is scheduled for Jan. 15-16 in San Salvador. Davila said the CCD wanted to hold new talks to discuss compliance with the 1987 regional peace treaty, a return to Nicaragua of exiles, open elections for late 1990, and economic revitalization. The CCD is comprised of the Social Democratic and Social Christian parties in exile, the Southern Opposition Bloc, the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement and a faction of the Conservative Party. All groups pertain to the Nicaraguan Resistance (RN). As of Dec. 29, the RN had not issued a comment on the CCD proposal. Davila, who also heads the Social Christian Party, said the presidents of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador "have looked favorably upon our initiative and have promised to support it to search for peace in Nicaragua." He said their plan would also be delivered to US President-elect George Bush, who takes office January 20. Dec. 30: In Miami, Adolfo Calero, a leader of the "hard-line" contra faction, said that the contras were prepared to hold talks with Nicaraguan government representatives in Washington and suggested a Jan. 25 meeting date. "The climate for talks has improved," he said. Calero dissociated himself from the offer put forward by Cesar: "If he goes through with this proposal, he is acting apart from the resistance. Our offer is to meet with the Sandinistas for talks in Washington. No other proposal is official." Dec. 31: Cesar, leader of the "moderate" faction, and chief contra negotiator in past peace talks, said two of his allies in the movement, Roberto Urroz and Carlos Hurtado, were seeking to visit Managua on Jan. 4 or Jan. 5 to present the peace plan to Nicaraguan officials. Meanwhile, other contra representatives are to present the plan in other Central American capitals. Cesar said: "The idea is that the proposal would be discussed when the five Central American presidents meet January 15 and 16. Intense discussions are going on now. I am quite optimistic." According to the New York Times (01/01/89), Cesar's proposal resembles the one that contras made at the last negotiating session in June. Instead of requiring large-scale changes on the part of the government in days, the new proposal asks for such changes over a longer period of time. Cesar said, "The timetable is more flexible, but the principle of peace in exchange for democracy is still there. We are talking about gradual democratic reform." The proposal presented in June by the contras called for the release of thousands of prisoners, broader opposition access to the press and an impartial electoral commission. In addition to those points,

Cesar's proposal includes at least one new element: if the plan is signed, contras who accept its terms would agree to urge the US and other foreign governments to help rebuild Nicaragua's shattered economy. In a year-end speech, President Daniel Ortega mocked Cesar's proposal, but did not explicitly reject it. He said, "There has been talk of a proposal by so-called moderates. They want a program of democratization. So we invite them to accept amnesty, return to our country, and learn what democracy is." Next, Ortega referred to another proposal offered by the contras' most conservative faction, headed by Adolfo Calero and Enrique Bermudez. This proposal calls for Nicaraguan government and contra representatives to meet at the headquarters of the Organization of American States in Washington in late January. The president said, "For us what one or the other is saying has no credibility, because we see no agreement among the leadership of the contras... The contras are releasing a proposal here, another there, but we do not know which is the proposal of the US government...[T]he US that armed this monster, and now it does not know how to bury it." Nevertheless, said Ortega, the government is willing to accept the return of Nicaraguans who have "compromised" themselves with the contras, and are currently located in Honduras. The president said that when he visited Mexico City in early December to attend the inauguration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Honduran President Jose Azcona Hoyo "told me he was concerned about the contras in Honduras...I told Azcona that we would take them. I proposed that we would develop a repatriation plan to be implemented by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the Red Cross and other regional organizations..." In the year-end message and in an interview published in the Sandinista National Liberation Front's newspaper, *Barricada*, Ortega said that his government is preparing a proposal to present to the new US administration under George Bush. This proposal, said the president, will address all security issues of concern to the US and Nicaragua that have been aired over the past eight years in the Contadora plan, bilateral initiatives between the US and Nicaragua, and the Esquipulas II peace plan. In its Jan. 1 edition, the *New York Times* cited Paul Reichler, a US lawyer who represents the Nicaraguan government, as saying that he doubted the Sandinistas would open talks with Cesar. Reichler added that in January the Sandinistas would present a proposal of their own "that will be very attractive." Jan. 2: Resistance directors Adolfo Calero, Enrique Bermudez, Roberto Ferrey and Wilfredo Montalvan sent a letter to Costa Rican President Oscar Arias informing him of the RN's intentions to meet with Nicaraguan officials on Jan. 25 in Washington. In the note, the directorate acknowledged that the Nicaraguan government has elaborated a plan for a "peaceful solution" to the regional crisis, but accused Managua of not having done enough to resolve the domestic crisis. The letter said, "We have the honor of confirming to you, Mr. President, our willingness to reach a political solution to the conflict and that we have decided to accept Washington as the city where negotiations with the Sandinista government should continue." The RN proposed that OAS Secretary-General Joao Baena Soares, Roman Catholic Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo of Managua and the foreign ministers of the five Central American governments act as witnesses to the talks. The RN leaders said they were willing to call an end to contra military operations in exchange for democratic reforms by the Sandinistas. They also called for effective measures by a verification commission to monitor Sandinista compliance with the peace plan. "We consider it urgent that viable mechanisms be established to guarantee the independence of the (peace plan) verification commission," said the letter. Jan. 4: Contra leaders have received an urgent summons to Washington to meet with senior US officials in an effort to reduce conflicts among factions. Latin American diplomatic sources told AFP that Enrique Bermudez and Adolfo Calero and moderate leader Alfredo Cesar planned to attend meetings with Reagan administration officials. RN directors were to have begun meeting Jan. 4 with State Department Latin America specialists and Republican congresspersons, the

sources said, but some contra leaders were late in arriving. They are scheduled to meet with Elliott Abrams, the outgoing assistant secretary of state for Interamerican Affairs. Rebel spokesperson Jorge Rosales told reporters that "our forces have been ordered to adhere to the cease-fire but they are also authorized to defend themselves if they are attacked." Bermudez and Calero, who control the Resistance directorate, have proposed holding talks with representatives of the Nicaraguan government at the OAS on Jan. 25. In the past Bermudez and Calero insisted that any future talks take place in Central America outside of Nicaragua, while President Ortega said he would meet only in Managua or Washington. The Nicaraguan government rejected the new "official" RN proposal, stating that they were waiting to see what Bush's policy toward Managua would be. Cesar was expected to send two emissaries to meet with Nicaraguan officials Jan. 5 in Managua to present new peace proposals they said had the support of some other Central American governments. Cesar supporters have complained that the Bermudez-Calero forces call for a resumption of talks in Washington was aimed at sabotaging their initiative and stalling talks in the hope that the Bush administration would respond to the stalemate by renewing contra military aid. The Latin American sources told AFP that said the urgent meetings here with the opposing rebel leaders were called to prevent a dismantlement of the RN. Jan. 5: In a letter to Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo in Managua, the RN presented its suggestion for a meeting in Washington to resume peace talks with the Nicaraguan government. According to the Nicaraguan media, the letter said: "We have decided that Washington is the suitable place to continue negotiations with the Sandinistas." The last round of peace talks took place in June 1988 in Managua. (AFP, 12/27/88, 12/29/88, 01/04/89; New York Times, 01/01/89; Notimex, 12/31/88, 01/03/89; AP, 01/03/89; Xinhua, 01/05/89)

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