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## Wrap-up Of March 30-31 Central American Foreign Ministers Meeting

by Deborah Tyroler

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At the close of a two-day meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica, on March 31, foreign ministers of the five Central American countries formally requested that the United Nations establish an international observer force to patrol the region. The objective of the unarmed observers is to prevent violations of a 1987 regional peace accord that prohibits assistance to "irregular" armies, and the use of national territory as a staging ground against other countries. As outlined in a draft document, members of the observer force drawn from Spain, Canada, West Germany and a Latin American country that has not yet been chosen would patrol borders by helicopter, jeep and boat, and would have authority to conduct surprise inspections. Costa Rican President Oscar Arias said he asked Venezuela to send observers. A vote by the UN Security Council on the plan for the observer force is likely to take place in May. If approved, the plan would be effective for six month intervals, subject to Security Council approval. At the San Jose meeting, Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto gave his colleagues proposals for dismantling the contra army in Honduras, and for a regional effort against drug trafficking that would include US assistance. The idea of a common program to fight drug traffic was first advanced by d'Escoto at the United Nations days before the last regional summit concluded Feb. 14 in El Salvador. In San Jose, a Honduran diplomat, who requested anonymity, told reporters that the ministers had agreed to meet April 11-12 in Managua to continue discussions on the anti-drug proposal. Unidentified diplomats participating in the meeting told reporters on March 31 that no progress had been made on demobilizing Nicaraguan contra forces based in Honduras. Under the Feb. 14 accord, the five Central American presidents are committed to producing a plan for dismantling the contra bases by May 15. Nicaraguan diplomats have insisted that the dismantling must begin immediately after the plan is formulated, but the US and contra spokespersons have argued that the plan could permit contra forces to stay at least through February 1990, when Nicaraguan general elections are scheduled to take place. President Daniel Ortega said March 30 in Managua that a \$45 million package of non-military aid under consideration in the US should be used instead to disband the contras. Ortega and D'Escoto have both said Washington would be violating the February accords by maintaining the contras as a potential fighting force. Salvadoran diplomats proposed that the May 15 summit meeting in Guatemala be postponed until June 15, or until after president-elect Alfredo Cristiani takes offices. Nicaraguan diplomats insisted that the May deadline be kept. On March 31, Honduran Foreign Minister Carlos Lopez Contreras told reporters the summit will be postponed to June 15. On March 30, Honduran diplomats said they had concrete proposals for resolving the impasse on when to begin dismantlement of the contra forces. Other diplomats said no written proposals were exchanged and no progress was announced. (Basic data from AP, 03/31/89; New York Times, 04/01/89)

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