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More On Guatemala City Meeting Between Contras & Nicaraguan Opposition Parties

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On April 9-10 in Guatemala City, leaders of the contras or Nicaraguan Resistance, and of 15 Nicaraguan domestic opposition parties met formally for the first time. The participants reportedly agreed that the changes proposed by Nicaragua in its electoral code were insufficient and that the opposition should present a single candidate to face off with the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in the February 1990 elections. (See CAU 04/14/89.) Contra leader Adolfo Calero said, "The idea on both sides is to form a great, broad, national coalition to defeat the Sandinistas. That is our goal." Andres Zuniga of the Liberal Party (PALI) told the Washington Post (04/12/89), "It will be difficult to unify, because we have a history of internal strife, but if we are thinking of the Nicaraguan people, it is something we must do. History will blame those who do not unify. The Sandinistas will stay in power, we will lose the elections and no one will blame the Sandinistas."

Mauricio Diaz, president of the Popular Social Christian Party (PPSC), told the CAU on April 16 that the reports by the foreign press on the meeting in Guatemala City misrepresented its outcome. The PPSC was represented by a party member in Guatemala City. According to Diaz, participants in the meeting agreed on "absolutely nothing" of any substance. He pointed out that for many Nicaraguan parties, an agreement with the contras or contra participation in any aspect of the election campaign and candidate selection process would be anathema for their chances to win votes in the February elections. When asked which parties, if any, had an interest in combining forces with the contras for the elections, he replied, "Only those in the [Nicaraguan Democratic] Coordinator." Diaz stated that given the past and current history of Nicaraguan party politics, the launching of a single presidential candidate or for any other major office by all or most opposition parties, is extremely unlikely. Diaz was visiting Las Vegas, New Mexico, last weekend as a participant in a conflict resolution panel focused on Nicaragua. The panel was sponsored by the Trinity Forum (Santa Fe, New Mexico) and the US Peace Institute. [Notes on parties: The "Democratic Coordinator" (Nicaraguan Democratic Coordinating Committee-Ramiro Sacasa) was formed in 1981. The four political parties belonging to the coalition are considered to be Nicaragua's most conservative: Constitutionalist Liberal Party (PLC); Social Christian Party (PSC), Conservative Party of Nicaragua (PCN); and Social Democratic Party (PSD). Zuniga's party, PALI, is described as far right, and has reportedly attempted to join the Coordinator in the past. PALI membership ranks among the most minuscule of all Nicaraguan parties and factions. According to Nicaraguan observers, PALI has virtually no presence except among foreign journalists. Diaz ran for president in 1984 on his party's ticket. The PPSC captured six seats in the National Assembly in those elections. The party defines itself as "Christian-inspired socialist," advocating greater worker control through cooperatives, greater democratization and a larger role for private enterprise in mixed economy. The PPSC is perceived as an important and articulate voice of the moderate loyal opposition. Diaz represents opposition parties on the National Reconciliation Commission, created under the auspices of the 1987 regional peace agreement. National memberships of all Nicaraguan parties are small, with the exception of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). The combined membership of the opposition parties not included in the Coordinator outnumbers that of its four parties. The vast majority of Nicaraguan citizens
have no party affiliation.] The pro-government daily El Nuevo Diario condemned the meeting in Guatemala City as evidence that the domestic opposition lacks an identity other than that provided by the contras' military power, and, by the extension, the US. The Diario described the meeting as "A Blood Wedding" in a banner headline in its April 12 edition, followed by "National Guard Terror to Guarantee the Internal Opposition." The official newspaper of the FSLN, Barricada, declared that contra leaders' contact with opposition leaders had corrupted the opposition. Next, Barricada suggested that the meeting was a prelude to a boycott of the elections and return to the contra war. An editorial in Barricada said, "The tragedy is for those parties that call themselves the 'internal opposition' have shown themselves incapable of handling the small amount of legitimacy that they have, and for those who weren't already converted to have turned themselves into an opposition hired by Washington." (Basic data from New York Times, 04/15/89)

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