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Summary Of Maneuvers Prior To Aug. 5-7 Central American Summit

by Deborah Tyroler

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In February, at their last summit meeting in El Salvador, Central America's five presidents agreed to join efforts in the dismantlement (demobilization, repatriation and relocation) of the Nicaraguan contra military force based in Honduras. Another major outcome of the summit was Nicaragua's pledge to advance the date of general elections to Feb. 25, 1990, as well as implementing a variety of electoral process and media reforms and inviting a host of foreign observers to ensure that the elections are as fair and clean as possible. The presidents also agreed that within 90 days they would prepare a draft plan for contra demobilization, and reconvene in May. After postponing their subsequent summit for nearly three months for a variety of reasons, the five leaders are now scheduled to meet Aug. 5-7 in Honduras. The time table for contra demobilization was not linked to the Nicaraguan elections in the February summit agreement. The timing and procedures of contra dismantlement are major items on the August summit agenda. Summarized below are recent developments and statements of political maneuvering focused on the dismantlement issue.

* Last week top contra field commanders met for the first time with the presidents of Costa Rica, Guatemala and El Salvador to urge them to hold off on demobilization until after the Nicaraguan elections. The presidents agreed to meet with the military commanders at the request of Asst. Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard Aronson. State Department officials helped organized the tour. According to the Washington Post, the field commanders' tour represents a strategy shift. Previously, contra forces were represented in foreign capitals by the contras' Miami-based political directorate. The new "strategy" was established in meetings two weeks ago in Washington between State Department officials and the field commanders. Unidentified State Department officials cited by the Post have charged that some long-time contra leaders, e.g., Adolfo Calero and military chief Enrique Bermudez, have failed to adapt to the political situation in the US and Nicaragua. An unidentified administration official cited by Post said that a key Bermudez ally in this dispute is the CIA. Everett Briggs, the new National Security Council official in charge of Latin America, and former ambassador to Honduras, is also perceived as an ally by Bermudez and other contras critical of the State Department. * On July 28, President Bush telephoned Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, and Honduran President Jose Azcona Hoyo to urge them to wait until February 25, 1990, before scheduling dismantlement. Administration officials have repeatedly asserted that the Nicaraguan government and legislature have adopted election laws and procedures that bias the outcome of the presidential election in favor of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). The Post (07/30/89) points out that a Congressional Research Service study and other sources have said that the Nicaraguan electoral legislation and media reforms compare favorably with those in some other Latin American countries. July 28: Honduran Foreign Minister Carlos Lopez welcomed the July 27 UN Security Council resolution calling for an end to outside support for insurgents in Central America. He told reporters that the contras "must leave as soon as possible," adding "they should have left yesterday." July 29: On Friday night, a meeting of the five Central American deputy foreign ministers in Guatemala City ended in stalemate. In remarks to reporters on Saturday, Nicaraguan Deputy Foreign Minister Victor

Hugo Tinoco said, "I am sorry to say that this meeting distinguishes itself by being the first in many years in which we didn't at least agree on something." According to Tinoco, the main problem was the attitude of Salvadoran counterpart Ricardo Valdivieso, who insisted on a "symmetry thesis" between the Nicaraguan contras and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). Tinoco said Valdivieso arrived at the meeting armed with "troglodyte positions" which were out of step with the spirit of the encounter. The deputy ministers comprise a technical commission created under the August 1987 Esquipulas II peace accord. Valdivieso's counterparts were reportedly irritated by having to explain how such summit preparation sessions function. Linking the contra dismantlement plan with a similar effort directed at the Salvadoran rebels is not contemplated in previous agreements signed by the Central American presidents, nor was it included in a technical plan for the demobilization, repatriation and relocation of the contra forces approved by the deputy ministers in May. According to Tinoco, the technical commission encounter was not necessary in that the agenda for the foreign ministers' Aug. 1-2 meeting in Guatemala City had already been completed. He told Notimex that El Salvador had called the meeting of deputy ministers "with the threat that if we did not attend El Salvador would not participate in the foreign ministers meeting." On Friday morning, Costa Rican Deputy Minister Melvin Saenz and Guatemalan Deputy Minister Julio Martini suggested that El Salvador could introduce a proposal that would be discussed at the subsequent foreign ministers' meeting. Their suggestion was approved by Tinoco and the Honduran deputy minister. Saenz told Notimex that in the afternoon session, the Salvadoran delegation rejected the earlier proposal, insisting instead on a discussion of FMLN dismantlement by the technical commission. Saenz said he had refused to discuss the contents of a document which his ministry knew nothing about. The deputy ministers of Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica accepted copies to be delivered to respective ministries of a document containing a plan for FMLN dismantlement that would allegedly be linked to the language of the February summit agreement. Tinoco declined. According to Salvadoran Deputy Minister Valdivieso, his government will not "recognize" contra dismantlement unless the FMLN demobilization plan is also recognized. Tinoco told Notimex that the position on contra dismantlement held by El Salvador's ruling party, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), probably reflects the perspective of the extreme right in the US, and their commitment to prevent the extinction of the Nicaraguan contras. The deputy minister said the US ultra-right cannot rely on the State Department to assure the contras' continuity in light of the Department's recent "pragmatism." In response to a question by Notimex, Tinoco said this pragmatism was seen in efforts to eliminate the budget for the contras' political office in Miami, public announcements of support for the contra demobilization plan, and requests that contra leaders return to Nicaragua. (Basic data from Washington Post, 07/28/89, 07/30/89; AFP, 07/28/89; Notimex, 07/29/89; Radio Venceremos weekly report, 07/23-30/89)

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