

8-9-1989

Central American Presidents Establish Timetable For Contra Demobilization: Summary Of Statements & Events

Deborah Tyroler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Central American Presidents Establish Timetable For Contra Demobilization: Summary Of Statements & Events." (1989). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/3255>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Central American Presidents Establish Timetable For Contra Demobilization: Summary Of Statements & Events

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, August 9, 1989

Aug. 4: After a 22-hour dialogue, much of which was broadcast live on state-run television and radio stations, representatives of the Nicaraguan government and political opposition parties signed a 40-point accord responding to numerous concerns expressed by the opposition. The government initiated the negotiations to defuse opposition complaints. The accord was also a joint statement by 20 legally registered opposition parties and the government calling on the Central American presidents to approve a plan for the "demobilization, relocation and voluntary repatriation" of the contras, and on "governments with interests in the Central American region" to refrain from "covert activities" in Nicaragua in connection with the electoral process. Seventeen opposition parties agreed to sign the major document. Another three ultra-leftist parties signed a separate agreement with the government. The two accords were virtually identical, with one exception: in the agreement with the three radical parties the reference to "governments" having interests in Central America was spelled out as meaning the US government and the CIA. Speaking for UNO, a 14-party coalition, Jaime Bonila of the Independent Liberal Party said, "No country, however powerful, has the right to interfere in the Nicaraguan electoral process." Selected major accord provisions are summarized below: * Suspension of the military draft, beginning in September 1989, until after the Feb. 25, 1990, elections. * Repeal of the Law for the Maintenance of Order and Public Security, which allows the arrest of government opponents suspected of subversive activity. * Repeal of a law allowing police to try and sentence criminals. * Prohibiting the Interior Ministry from shutting down or fining newspapers and radio stations during the electoral campaign. * Prohibition of property confiscation for political reasons. * 30 points pertaining to electoral procedures include guaranteeing opposition access to voter lists and ballots, requiring soldiers to vote outside military installations, prohibiting the use of government property for party activity and allowing public opinion polls until 30 days before the election. * Unconditional amnesty for political prisoners once contra camps in Honduras are dismantled. This move will benefit 1,605 contras in Nicaraguan jails. * Opposition parties are to receive access to prime time on state television free of charge during the electoral campaign. * Establishment of a seven-member advisory group to the Supreme Electoral Council. (See unofficial translation of main agreement, this issue of CAU.) Aug. 5: The three-day Central American summit in Tela, Honduras, opened. The five presidents attending the summit were Alfredo Cristiani (El Salvador), Oscar Arias (Costa Rica), Vinicio Cerezo (Guatemala), Jose Azcona (Honduras), and Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua). Aug. 6: According to unidentified diplomats cited by Notimex, as well as President Azcona, the five presidents had already agreed on the broad strokes of the contra demobilization plan. Azcona said the discussion was focused on details of disarmament, relocation and repatriation. Diplomats told Notimex that the presidents had agreed to "discuss" demobilization of the Salvadoran Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), as requested by President Cristiani. However, Cristiani's four counterparts refused to incorporate the FMLN in a summit agreement wherein the Salvadoran rebels would be demobilized under the same arrangements (and presumably, the same timetable) as the Nicaraguan contras. As of Sunday, Cristiani had managed to persuade his colleagues to include special mention of the FMLN in the

final agreement when referring to support for voluntary demobilization of all "irregular forces" in the Central American region. [Prior to the summit, Honduran President Azcona had argued that although the Nicaraguan contras and the FMLN deserve "equal treatment in the generic sense," the two cases are "completely different." For instance, he and Costa Rican President Arias had noted that the contras are based largely outside Nicaragua on Honduran territory, while FMLN rebels operate within El Salvador. Before the summit, Azcona told reporters that to disarm the FMLN guerrillas, the Salvadoran government should negotiate with them.] At Tela, Nicaraguan officials suggested that demobilized contras would be more likely to return to Nicaragua under an immediate, regionally supervised accord, and reiterated earlier suggestions that the government would provide incentives such as land and financial aid to persuade the men to leave Honduras. President Azcona has often attempted to diminish the Honduran role, arguing among other things that contra units will resist relocation and that his government will not demobilize them by force. Prior to the summit, he told reporters that contra demobilization could not be left solely to the Honduran armed forces, "because this would mean the shedding of blood by Honduran soldiers." According to Azcona, "We don't have the power to decide unilaterally that the contras will leave tomorrow. That's not the way it is. There has to be a contribution from Nicaragua, and then from everyone who has to do with this problem." Aug. 7: The presidents resumed talks late Monday morning after reportedly meeting until 4 a.m. Shortly after the talks resumed, some journalists wrote that the summit had "bogged down," result of statements by Nicaraguan officials. President Ortega told reporters: "The United States is exerting great pressure so no agreement is reached. They are in direct contact with all the delegations except Nicaragua." Nicaraguan Deputy Foreign Minister Jose Leon Talavera said, "Unfortunately, this morning we are getting unexpected positions from the Salvadoran delegation that are delaying some of the important accords." He said El Salvador was demanding that the final communique call for demobilization of Salvadoran rebels in the same terms it requires for disbanding the contras. [According to the New York Times (08/07/89), unidentified diplomats said the US lobbying effort to convince Honduran President Azcona to permit the contras to remain in his country until late February 1990 included not only visits from high-level State Department officials, but also personal telephone calls from President Bush to Azcona and other presidents attending the summit. On the eve of the summit, Bush posed for a photograph with contra leaders, including military commander Enrique Bermudez. The US government had four observers in Tela who were meeting delegates outside the talks.] Also on Monday morning, copies of a bilateral agreement between Honduras and Nicaragua calling for withdrawal of the contras from Honduras by Dec. 8 were distributed to reporters. Nicaraguan deputy minister Talavera said the agreement would be part of the final accord. Nicaragua agreed to drop its case against Honduras at the World Court in the Hague, once the demobilization process was underway under the supervision of a United Nations-Organization of American States (OAS) team. In the suit, Nicaragua charged Honduras of violating the 1987 regional accord by permitting the contras to operate from that country. President Ortega gave the other presidents a letter from the Salvadoran rebels asking their cooperation in negotiating an end to the nine-year-old civil war. Later in the day, President Azcona read the text of the "Tela Declaration," or the final summit agreement. Major provisions of the accord are summarized below: * A verification commission comprised of UN and OAS secretaries general or their designated subordinate officials must be established within 30 days of Aug. 7. Contra demobilization would begin after the commission is established. The commission is to oversee the relocation or repatriation of disbanded troops. * Demobilization and repatriation of the contras and their families to Nicaragua is to be complete within 90 days, or by Dec. 8. * Contra fighters are to surrender their weapons to a peacekeeping force comprised

of Spanish, West German and Canadian soldiers. * Establishment of an armed UN peacekeeping force to guard the Honduran-Nicaraguan border against infiltration and illicit arms shipments. The new force, which is subject to approval by the UN Security Council, would be comprised of as many as 2,000 soldiers intended to prevent a resurgence of armed conflict on the frontier. * Final approval for an existing plan to invite the UN to establish mobile units of unarmed observers to monitor borders throughout Central America. The units expected to be made up of personnel from Canada, Spain and West Germany are in compliance with regional accords that prohibit Central American countries from supporting insurgencies against one another or allowing their territory to be used for that purpose. Deployment of the units was approved in principle by UN officials last spring. A final accord was blocked by Honduras over disputes surrounding the Nicaraguan claim against Honduras before the World Court. * The accord calls on the FMLN to offer a cease-fire and enter into dialogue with the Salvadoran government. * The Nicaraguan Resistance is requested to accept the demobilization plan. * Nicaragua reiterated pledges to "democratize," and agreed to negotiate directly with the contras on resettlement and participation in Nicaragua's political process. * The five presidents agreed to organize a regional meeting on the environment and development scheduled for Aug. 30-31. * The importance of establishing the Central American parliament (a provision of the 1987 accords) was reiterated. * The importance of eradicating the drug trade in Central America was reiterated. * The presidents agreed to reconvene for a summit before year-end in Nicaragua. The New York Times (07/08/89) pointed out that since the contra demobilization is "voluntary," some or all contra fighters may refuse to accept the terms of the accord. Armed contras would be prevented from entering Nicaragua by the international border peacekeeping force. The Honduran government has made it clear that the contras, especially armed contras, are not welcome to remain in that country. Next, under terms of the agreement between President Bush and the Congress, contras who refuse to disarm and remain in Honduras would not be eligible for US funds. US officials have assured President Azcona that "they're our responsibility," an unidentified administration official told the Times. However, some congresspersons have already declared their opposition to resettling the contras in the US. The Bush administration reportedly has no contingency plans to grant the contras and their families immigration status. At a brief press conference following announcement of the summit agreement, President Ortega said that President Bush must support the summit agreement by ensuring that the US humanitarian aid currently earmarked for the contras be used for the demobilization plan. In response to a question on the possibility that contra fighters may refuse to leave Honduras, President Azcona replied: "The accord has the full support of Honduras." Guatemalan President Cerezo said that it may be possible for contras who disarm and refuse resettlement in Nicaragua to relocate in Guatemala, provided they are "willing to live in peace" and respect Guatemalan law. He emphasized, however, that the summit agreement is premised on the repatriation of a majority of the contra fighters after demobilization. Cerezo said, "I think this will be the best agreement in practical terms that we have ever reached. This establishes real steps, concrete measures, to accomplish what we have been working to achieve." Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto said, "The Tela summit must be recognized as a landmark in the Central American quest for peace and independence." AP reported that during a speech in Madison, Ala., contra leader Adolfo Calero said he would not ask the contra fighters to disarm until Nicaraguan elections are held. In Tegucigalpa, a member of the contra general staff, Boanerges Mathus, was quoted as saying, "We will not lay down our arms, and our fight will continue in the mountains of Nicaragua." (Basic data from Notimex, 08/06/89, 08/07/89; AP, 08/04/89, 08/06/89, 08/07/89; AFP, 08/07/89; Xinhua, 08/07/89; Washington Post, 08/05/89, 08/06/89; New York Times, 08/05-08/89)

-- End --