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Update: Nicaraguan Contra Demobilization, U.N. Peacekeeping Force

by Deborah Tyroler

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Last week United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar announced the appointment of Assistant Secretary General Alvaro de Soto as his personal representative in the three peace initiatives requested by five Central American presidents: voluntary demobilization, repatriation or relocation of the Nicaraguan contras (and of other rebels in the region); creation of a peacekeeping force that would include land, air and naval observation posts to help prevent violations of accord security provisions; and, monitoring of the Nicaraguan electoral process. The UN and Organization of American States secretaries general have formed a joint commission for these tasks at the request of the Central American presidents. A UN reconnaissance mission was sent to Central America during the weekend with the objective of assisting Perez de Cuellar in preparing a formal proposal for the peacekeeping force to be submitted to the Security Council. In addition, some UN officials have said that an armed contingent for defensive purposes is likely to be included in the UN effort to oversee contra demobilization. Inclusion of armed personnel in this task would require approval by the UN Security Council. On Sept. 4, a 17-member UN mission headed for the Nicaraguan border zone. The mission, comprised of military and technical advisers, arrived in Costa Rica Sept. 3, and then headed for the Nicaraguan border on the following day. Individual contras living in the Honduran camps have been repeatedly quoted by the foreign press as saying that they will not leave until after Nicaragua's Feb. 25, 1990 elections. The Tela summit accord specifies that the camps should be disbanded by mid-December. On Sept. 5, in San Jose, Costa Rica, Organization of American States Secretary General Joao Baena Soares told reporters that serious difficulties regarding contra demobilization did not exist. He said he had no knowledge of "massive resistance" to demobilization among the contras encamped in Honduras. Baena Soares was in San Jose attending a regional meeting of the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The secretary general said that in September he planned a trip to Nicaragua to personally observe electoral preparations. He added that he was certain the February elections would be "clean and democratic." Baena Soares said a UN mission was completing a second inspection of the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border area with helicopter support. Mission members were discussing logistical support to be provided by the Costa Rican government to the UN military peacekeeping force. According to the OAS secretary general, the UN peacekeeping force will be comprised of soldiers from Canada, Venezuela, Ireland, Spain and Italy. Their function, he added, will consist of preventing arms trafficking banned under the regional accords, and cross-border armed attacks. [Basic data from AFP, 09/04/89; Notimex, 09/05/89; 09/03/89 report by UNITEX (UN Information Transfer Exchange)]

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