10-18-1989

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U.N. Security Council Vote On Central American Peacekeeping Force Delayed

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Category/Department: General
Published: Wednesday, October 18, 1989

Unidentified Central American diplomats at the United Nations cited by the New York Times (10/14/89) say the Nicaraguan contras camped in Honduras are selling weapons and ammunition to El Salvador's Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front. The diplomats predict that the contras will try and raise as much cash as possible by selling the weapons rather than hand them over to the United Nations, and that many will resort to banditry or hire themselves out as mercenaries. Last month Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo said during a visit to the UN that the contras could become "the bandits of Central America" if they are not rapidly disarmed and disbanded. He called on the US to speed resettlement of the contras by using humanitarian aid allocated to them to finance agricultural and other projects in Nicaragua that might encourage them to go home.

According to the Times, on Oct. 12 the UN accepted a US suggestion to increase the size of the peacekeeping force planned for Central America in an effort to halt the transfer of arms from the contras to the FMLN. Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar asked the Security Council to send a 543-member peacekeeping force to the region containing 260 military observers, or twice the number first suggested by the Central American governments. Meanwhile, US representative at the UN, Thomas R. Pickering, has acted to delay a meeting by the Security Council to approve the estimated $41 million cost of the peacekeeping force for the first six months. Pickering has said the Bush administration needs a few days to consider the budgetary implications. The US owes the UN $491 million in unpaid regular budget contributions and $254 million for peacekeeping operations. On Oct. 16, State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler said some contras have sold their weapons to members of the FMLN, but that such activity has occurred in isolated cases. (Basic data from New York Times, 10/14/89; Notimex, 10/16/89)

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