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Resumption Of Salvadoran Peace Talks Stalled

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 8, deputy commander of the Salvadoran army's joint chiefs of staff, Col. Gilberto Rubio, said the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) was preparing a reenactment of its November military offensive. Since the last offensive which cost about 2,000 lives, the rebels and the government have requested that UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar mediate peace talks. President Alfredo Cristiani subsequently insisted that the rebels halt attacks on economic targets. The FMLN refused, asserting that all dimensions of a cease-fire on both sides are subject to negotiation, and are not topics for pre-conditions to peace talks. Earlier, Salvadoran officials asserted that the FMLN would have to "renounce all violence" before talks could resume. Christian Democrat Party leader Gerardo Lechevalier said the government's "bullying attitude" was "provoking the FMLN to show its strength." He said government officials sought to delay beginning negotiations in hopes that changes in the region would benefit them, particularly the defeat of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua. Lechevalier said he disagreed with the government's position that the FSLN defeat was a serious setback for the FMLN. He added that the government may provoke the rebels into feeling compelled to "show their force...because they have missiles and enough weapons to keep fighting for several years." Indicative of the Salvadoran government's position on the impact of the Nicaraguan elections on the FSLN is an official statement by the Armed Forces on Feb. 26 which said that the UNO win is "positive for the consolidation of democracy in Central America and especially in El Salvador...This means the end of support for the FMLN. It will force them to dialogue and to accept any offer the government makes because their morale is very low." At a press conference in San Salvador on Feb. 28, Guillermo Ungo, secretary general of the Revolutionary National Movement (MNR), said that the election results in Nicaragua have brought El Salvador to the front stage of international attention. Within the US Congress, he said, some will insist on a similar solution for EL Salvador, or elections, democratization and reforms of various kinds. According to Ungo, the Nicaraguan elections will not turn the FMLN away from demanding dialogue and negotiations. The rebels, he said, are strong and autonomous. The FMLN's position on whether or not to continue the war and to participate in future elections, for instance, he said, will depend in large part on the "real willingness" of the Salvadoran and US governments to resume peace talks. The Cristiani administration's imposition of "unilateral actions" on the rebels as a pre-condition to negotiations, said Ungo, is understood by the FMLN as a lack of real commitment to resuming the peace talks. On Feb. 22, US Secretary of State James Baker asserted that subversives in El Salvador will be defeated with continued US aid. He told the House Foreign Affairs Committee, "I can say that we are winning and if we maintain the aid [to El Salvador] we will win." According to a report by Inter Press Service (03/23/90), analysts in Washington were "surprised and concerned" at the "hardening of the US position" and the effect it could have on the efforts of UN Secretary General to promote dialogue and negotiations to end the war. [Basic data from 02/19-26/90 weekly report by El Rescate (Los Angeles, CA); AFP, 03/08/90; Notimex, 02/28/90]

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