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United Nations May Play Major Role In Contra Dismantlement

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 9 in Macuto, Venezuela, US Vice President Dan Quayle met with Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez and Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez to discuss the Nicaraguan power transfer and contra demobilization. Macuto is the Venezuelan president's retreat, located at a Caribbean resort town. The meeting was held at the retreat instead of in Caracas in order to avoid possible anti-US demonstrations. The Bush administration has proposed using UN troops to separate the Sandinista and contra armies in Nicaragua. Perez and Gonzalez emphasized the need for a "very early" dismantlement of the contra army, preferably before April 25, the date of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro's installation as president. Quayle said his government believes the contras do not have sufficient security guarantees, and that the demobilization should proceed simultaneously with the Sandinistas transferring power to Barrios de Chamorro. Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega said contras continue to launch attacks into Nicaragua from Honduras. Both Ortega and Barrios de Chamorro called for the contras to disband before the transfer of power on April 25, but contra leaders refused. The UN force currently in Nicaragua known as the UN Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) was approved by the Security Council in November 1989. Its mission is to verify the cutoff of aid to Central American rebel groups from outside sources, and to patrol borders in order to prevent guerrillas from launching attacks from neighboring countries. In New York, UN spokesperson Juan Carlos Brandt said, "The new mandate being discussed for ONUCA would have it play a key role in disarming the Nicaraguan resistance forces, and possibly their voluntary repatriation. If the Security Council decides to give ONUCA that responsibility, it would require significant increases in personnel and other resources." At a March 13 press conference, Elliot Richardson, who represented UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar in monitoring the Nicaraguan elections, said that the contras could be disbanded by April 25. The UN plan, he said, to disarm and resettle the contras and their families will ensure their safety. Perez de Cuellar plans to report this week to the UN Security Council on proposals to expand the ONUCA's mandate to include disarmament and possibility repatriation of the contras. The original mandate called for a 625-member force, but UN officials say the broader role involving the contras would require a substantial increase in personnel. (Basic data from AP, 03/09/90, 03/13/90; New York Times, 03/10/90)

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