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Deborah Tyroler

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Central American Summit Tentatively Scheduled For March 31-April 1 In Nicaragua

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 20, the Nicaraguan government issued a formal invitation to the presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to participate in a summit meeting scheduled for March 31-April 1 in Managua. The major agenda item is contra demobilization. Sources at the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry told Notimex that Managua will propose the immediate implementation of a joint demobilization plan. Next, the Nicaraguans will request establishing a calendar for regional negotiations on a reasonable balance of military forces throughout the region, and signing a regional cooperation agreement on eradicating drug trafficking and obtaining international support for transforming Central America into a peace zone. Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani is the only one of the heads of state who has presented objections to attending the summit in Managua. His government maintains that the Nicaraguan government accelerated weapons deliveries to the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) after the Feb. 25 elections. A communique sent to the four governments' foreign ministries said that the Nicaraguan government insists on its demand that US "humanitarian" aid provided to the contras be turned over to the International Verification and Support Commission (CIAV), established under a previous regional agreement, to implement the contra repatriation process. UN peacekeeping forces (ONUCA) would execute demobilization and disarmament operations in Honduras before the contras are repatriated. Contras inside Nicaragua would be confined to specified areas close to the country's borders with Honduras to the north, and Costa Rica, to the south. The US government apparently is opposed to disarming the contras at their Honduran camps. According to reliable sources cited by Notimex, Washington prefers a generalized cease-fire, after which the armed contras would enter Nicaragua and then be located in the special areas. On Tuesday in Tegucigalpa, Honduran Foreign Minister Mario Carias Zapata said the summit would take place at the Montelimar tourist resort, located on the Pacific, some 70 km. from Managua. On March 19, Costa Rican Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Rivera Bianchini said his government to participating in a summit late this month to reach an agreement on contra demobilization before April 25. He said, "The contra no longer has a reason for being, given the changes that have taken place in Nicaragua after the presidential elections... We have never believed that the contra were a solution, much less at present." (Basic data from Notimex, 03/19/90, 03/20/90)

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