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U.S. Military Experts Assist Nicaraguan Army

by Deborah Tyroler

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Jan. 30: Interior Minister Carlos Hurtado told the National Assembly's human rights committee that a team of experts from the US Army would arrive in Nicaragua Feb. 3. He said the team's mission includes providing assistance to the Sandinista Popular Army (EPS) for its civilian disarmament campaign. Jan. 31: EPS spokesperson Lt. Col. Ricardo Wheelock told reporters that the US Army team was scheduled to arrive Feb. 1. He said the team was invited to provide advice by the Nicaraguan army and President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro's government on means of improving army weapons and munitions inventory control systems. According to Wheelock, the US military personnel would not participate in any way in the disarmament campaign. The spokesperson said, "At no time are soldiers going to come [to Nicaragua] from any other country and disarm civilians or participate in activities which are the domain of the EPS and the Nicaraguan people." Wheelock added that over past 45 days, military experts from Canada, Ecuador, Sweden, Peru and Honduras had visited Nicaragua. According to Wheelock, US Army personnel have visited Nicaragua on previous occasions. During Chamorro's inauguration in 1990, he said, three US military helicopters were in Nicaragua to provide security for US diplomats attending the ceremonies. In November 1991, a delegation from the Inter-American Defense Board, an autonomous affiliate of the Organization of American States (OAS), visited Managua to provide assistance in deactivation of anti-personnel mines. The delegation included US soldiers. National Assembly president Alfredo Cesar said he supported the decision to seek technical assistance from US military experts. He added, "It's a shame they couldn't have come sooner." Feb. 1: EPS spokesperson Col. Lenin Cerna told reporters that the US team scheduled to arrive on Saturday afternoon consisted of two soldiers and two civilians. He said their activities would be limited to helping Nicaraguan army personnel to carry out an inventory of weapons and munitions, and to elaborate maintenance and tracking procedures. In addition, said Cerna, the team will also assist in developing plans to deactivate an estimated 120,000 land mines. The US team, said Cerna, will work with a special EPS task force established in December last year to deal with the weapons control situation. Task force members include Cerna, counter-intelligence director Col. Omar Hallesleven, and logistics director Col. Roberto Calderon. (Basic data from ACAN-EFE, 01/30-02/01/92; Agence France-Presse, 01/31/92, 02/01/92)

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