

countries, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica. In particular, the Nicaraguan Resistance (the "Contras") and the government forces (the "Sandinistas") were tired of war and its toll in lives and resources and, with the end of the Cold War, external military aid was diminishing. While the political climate was thus propitious, the length of, and the atrocities committed during the war in Nicaragua had created deep animosity between the protagonists.

The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration operational plan for the Contras in Honduras and Nicaragua was an *ad hoc* effort, produced in country by ONUCA and was implemented in concert with an Organization of American States (OAS) team called the Comision Nacional para la Consolidacion de la Paz (International Commission of Support and Verification) or CIAV, which was responsible for the civilian aspects of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme (DDRP). The plan did not include the Sandinista army which had agreed *inter alia* to a later reduction in its strength. The plan called for the addition of a Venezuelan battalion to the approximately 200 military observers of ONUCA in order to effect the DDRP. There was to be one DDRP site in Honduras, the Contra base camp at Yamales, and eight others spread throughout Nicaragua. The plan only extended to the early stages of DDRP operations and did not include the longer term development phase of the reintegration into civilian society of the ex-combatants. In the short term this was less of a problem than it might have been as there had been relatively little destruction of the infrastructure and the government promised land plots to the ex-combatants, who were generally subsistence farmers. Ultimately, however, the government had difficulty fulfilling its commitment given legal challenges over the ownership of the lands in question.

It is worthy of note that the original plan called for demobilization before the national election. This did not happen and the Contra forces were therefore still in place when Violetta Chamora and her coalition defeated the Sandinista government. Shortly after the election, given the lack of any further "cause" for the Contras to pursue and USA support for the peace process including substantial financing, Contra disarmament and demobilization began and was completed in a relatively short period of time.

Initially the quality of weaponry turned in was very poor. By the end of the process, however, at the last collection site, the most sophisticated of the Contra weaponry -- the US supplied ground to air "Redeye" missiles -- were handed over. On the other hand, although ONUCA had no baseline data against which to verify such allegations, anecdotal evidence at the time -- since confirmed -- suggested that, for every weapon turned in, there were another two or three hidden away in the bush.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> See for example the discussion at pages 34-35 of the "Nicaragua Case Study" in *Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Nicaragua and El Salvador*, UNIDIR Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project.