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U.S. Secretary of State Praises Guatemala, El Salvador for Leadership

by LADB Staff

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In a speech to the 16th General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) on Nov. 11 in Guatemala City, Secretary of State George Shultz praised the Salvadoran and Guatemalan governments for their leadership in the democratic revolution that is "transforming the hemisphere."

Overall, his remarks were focused on three areas of intra-regional cooperation: democracy, political and economic issues (recession and the debt crisis), and the program to curb drug abuse and drug trafficking. On Central America, the Secretary said that the US is not interested in seeing the region turned into a "vortex of East-West turmoil." As proof of this commitment, Shultz pointed out that the US provided aid to help Nicaragua rebuild after the fall of Somoza in 1979.

But the Sandinistas, he said, then sought arms from the Soviet bloc, and "used them to deny the Nicaraguan people their right of self-determination." Shultz said the US accepted the Sandinista government's pledges of democracy and nonalignment. He then reiterated Reagan administration claims that Managua is intervening in the domestic affairs of neighboring states; the Sandinistas have launched an unprecedented arms race in the region with the assistance of the USSR and Cuba; and, Nicaragua is the principal destabilizing force in Central America. The Secretary also stated that Washington has supported the Contadora process since its inception.

"Unfortunately, nearly four years of effort by the Contadora countries and, more recently, by the Contadora Support Group have not produced a workable agreement." Meanwhile, he said, the Sandinistas "continue to act as an armed vanguard against their people and their neighbors." Earlier, Shultz told reporters that the Soviet Union had shipped 20,000 tons of arms to Nicaragua since January this year. On the following day (Nov. 12), the Secretary told reporters that he had found "changes of opinion and judgment" among Latin American diplomats, and greater sympathy with regard to US policy to Nicaragua (NEW YORK TIMES, 11/12/86).

The TIMES story indicated that diplomats from other nations disputed Shultz's comment. One South American ambassador said "our countries are united" on the question of opposition to the contra war. Another said most Latin American governments continue to have a "strong commitment to non-intervention." After a one-hour meeting with Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo, Secretary Shultz said Cerezo agreed it was important to see "an end to the kind of regime that we find in Nicaragua." In contrast, Guatemalan spokesman Julio Santo said the meeting was cordial and contained no specific mention of Nicaragua.

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