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White House To Expand Contra Promotion Effort

by Deborah Tyroler

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Reagan administration officials announced June 22 that a new White House team will be assembled to solicit public and congressional support for the contra aid program. According to the officials, the decision to expand the White House role in contra promotions and to add experienced personnel to the effort was made before Asst. Secretary of State Elliott Abrams' latest problems and "has nothing to do" with congressional calls for his resignation. Officials said that probably two people will be added to the senior White House staff, one to head the effort to win congressional support and another in communications to help build public approval. "The increased attention contra policy is having on the Hill" requires that the administration coordinate the campaign from the White House, rather than have officials from several agencies try to run it, a senior White House official said. Abrams, in an impromptu interview June 22 after he addressed a closed-door session of congressional aides, acknowledged a need for additional personnel to help sell the contra program and said discussions on that issue have been underway for months. He said that news stories about efforts to oust him "will die ultimately. You guys will see as the weeks go by, here I am." One aide to the Republican congressional leadership said June 22 that "In effect, Abrams will stay on as assistant secretary for Latin America except for Nicaragua." On June 12, 129 House Democrats signed a letter to Shultz demanding that Abrams "resign or be replaced immediately." The lawmakers charged that Abrams "knowingly and deliberately misled Congress" and that he "can no longer function effectively." (Basic data from WASHINGTON POST, 06/23/87)

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