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Deborah Tyroler

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## **Nicaraguan President Accuses U.S. Of Escalating Tensions In Central American By Furnishing Redeye Missiles To Contras**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

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At a July 22 press conference in Managua, Defense Minister Gen. Humberto Ortega, denounced the United States for escalating tensions in the region by providing the contras with Redeye anti-aircraft missiles. Ortega said that on the night of July 18-19, a special army squad detected a presumed CIA supply plane, which he said was disoriented by poor weather and not able to drop its payload precisely in a designated spot. Several parachutes were on display at the news conference where the Redeye was shown. The Redeye has a range of about two miles and is used principally against low-flying aircraft. Ortega said that the Sandinista Air Force had lost two Soviet-made helicopters, one of them an Mi-24 gunship, to Redeye fire this year. These missiles, said Ortega, were provided by the US to the contras straight from its military arsenal, and were not purchased by the contras in the black market. He pointed out that the first time anti-aircraft missiles appeared in Central America, the Reagan administration claimed the contras acquired them in the black market. The minister stated that the FDN (Nicaraguan Democratic Force) is disintegrating, seen in large numbers of defectors. He warned that when the FDN disbands, many of the sophisticated weapons provided by the US and other patrons will "disappear" into the black market. He warned that Redeye missiles might now appear on the Central American black market, where they could be acquired by Salvadoran rebels or "other forces of the right or left." He also said a terrorist group equipped with Redeye missiles "could seriously endanger civil aviation in the region." Since last December, when the contras began infiltrating back into Nicaragua from Honduras, clandestine night flights sponsored by the CIA have been their main source of supply. US officials have indicated that anti-aircraft weapons were among the arms being dropped, but July 22 marked the first apparent confirmation that the contras are receiving Redeye missiles. Ortega estimated that the contras have been given about 200 Redeyes. "It would not be surprising to see dozens of these weapons appear with forces of the right or left, since the US has now opened the possibility that they can be bought from mercenaries. In the hands of the mercenaries, there is no control." (Basic data from PRENSA LATINA, 07/22/87; NEW YORK TIMES, 07/23/87)

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