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Congressional Caucus Says Bulk Of U.S. Aid To El Salvador Used To Further War; Charges Aid Is Misused

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Nov. 15, the bipartisan congressional Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus released a report stating that the means through which US economic and military aid is used in El Salvador has not improved that country's chances for peace and economic recovery. The caucus report said that despite administration claims, three-fourths of \$429 million in US aid is being used to further the civil war. The report signed by Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.), Rep. Jim Leach (R-Iowa), and Rep. George Miller (D-Cal.) was distributed to all 130 caucus members on Nov. 16, and is a follow-up of a similar one prepared two years ago. At that time the Caucus traced actual expenditures rather than budget classifications, and challenged administration claims that most US aid went for economic relief. According to the caucus, the largest category of aid was "for what the administration refers to as aid for stabilization, restoration and humanitarian needs. Despite their innocuous labels, these programs are used to prosecute the war and repair its damage." The report stated that only a small portion of US aid is actually used for economic development, land redistribution, and improving the Salvadoran judicial and police system. Next, said the report, in violation of US law, Salvadoran military officers control distribution of some food and economic aid. Caucus recommendations include the following: Congress should change the nature of US aid to guarantee that it is employed largely for social programs, such as nutrition, health care, education and potable water; suspension of all aid to police; and, linking of US aid to the Salvadoran government's willingness to comply with the Guatemala peace accord. On Nov. 16, the State Department rejected Caucus assertions that US aid to El Salvador is being misused by the Salvadoran military to conduct the war. At his regular news briefing, spokesman Charles Redman said the Department had consulted "fully" with Congress on all US aid programs for El Salvador. Since 1982, said Redman, "repeated audits by the inspector general of the Agency for International Development and by the General Accounting Office confirm that US assistance to El Salvador is well managed, subject to tight financial controls, and consistent with the intent of Congress." According to Redman, in 1986 only slightly more than one-third of total aid consisted of military assistance, and that figure dropped to about 20% in 1987. The State Department's response to the Caucus report two years ago was that the methodology was inappropriate, and thus its conclusions were "unfair." (Basic data from New York Times, 11/16/87)

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