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On U.S. Aid To Guatemalan Military & Police

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Total & Military Aid: Since 1986, total US aid to Guatemala has averaged about \$150 million per year. Western Europe, Israel, Taiwan, and South Africa provide Guatemala with substantial amounts of financial aid and weapons. On Sept. 22, 1988, a House-Senate conference committee approved the final version of the federal government budget for FY1989. Included in the total were \$146.4 million in aid for Guatemala. The agreement earmarked \$9 million in non-lethal MAP (Military Assistance Program) funds for Guatemala, a \$2 million increase over the original appropriation for FY1988, and \$4 million higher than the House version of the foreign aid bill. Moreover, the committee agreement surpassed the Reagan administration's original request of \$5.4 million. Of the FY1989 total, \$2 million are earmarked for civic action programs and the construction of military barracks. Despite Guatemala's deteriorating human rights situation and the challenge by rightwing civilians and military officers against the Cerezo government, the conference committee refused to incorporate conditions which Guatemala City must fulfill in order to receive MAP funds. The conference agreement, like the House and Senate bills, terminates US aid to any Central American nation if a civilian government is deposed by a military coup or decree. The measure continues current law, as provided for in both bills, requiring a report to Congress 15 days in advance of any sale of helicopters or other military aircraft to Central American countries. In addition, the State Department must notify Congress whenever any helicopter or other military aircraft is provided to a Central American country by a foreign nation. * In January 1989, the Reagan administration submitted to Congress its fiscal year 1990 budget request. Included were \$168 million in economic (\$158.5 million) and military (\$9.5 million) aid for Guatemala. **On Police Aid:** Between January 1986 and mid-1988, the Guatemalan police received \$50 million worth of technical training, investigation equipment, vehicles and arms from the US, Mexico, Venezuela, Spain and East Germany. The most recent aid package received at that time was provided by Spain, and consisted of rubber bullets, water cannons and other anti-riot gear. Earlier in 1988, Atlanta Mayor and former US Ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young, withdrew support he had promised in August 1987 to the Guatemalan police. Young was to provide training in modern operational techniques as part of a plan to improve Guatemala's human rights image. He backed out after being bombarded by protests from US human rights groups. **Government Weapons Purchases:** In early October 1988, the Guatemalan government purchased 20,000 M16 rifles (from Colt Industries, Hartford, Conn.) for approximately \$13.8 million. The M16s will replace Israeli Galils as the standard weapon of the country's armed forces. In October, the government in Guatemala City was also seeking acquisition of eight US-made helicopters from Saudi Arabia or Jordan. The expected total outlay for the helicopters is nearly \$30 million, and would derive from discretionary funds in Guatemala's military budget. Since the rifles purchase did not exceed \$14 million, the State Department issued the export license without notifying Congress. Some members of Congress called it a "back door approach" to rearming the Guatemalan military. The helicopter purchase must also be approved by the State Department under the Arms Export Act. **Other forms of U.S. military assistance:** On Nov. 28-Dec. 12, 1988, a contingent of some 40 US soldiers carried out parachuting and survival tactics maneuvers in El Peten department. El Peten borders on Mexico and Belize. The soldiers' presence in the area was kept secret until the Anthropological Institute Workers Union denounced

the maneuvers which allegedly caused damage to archeological sites in Yaxhua, located a few kilometers from the pre-Colombian city of Tikal. On Dec. 21, Guatemalan Defense Minister Hector Gramajo rejected the notion that military maneuvers in Guatemala by US soldiers violate the country's constitution, as alleged by several Guatemalan congresspersons. According to Guatemalan army spokesperson Col. Luis Rodriguez, "if they had been a battalion or a military installation, then we would have solicited the appropriate authorization." Rodriguez said that the maneuvers constituted a "simple exchange" between US troops and units of Guatemala's elite "Kaibiles." The Union's denunciations led the foreign relations commission of the Guatemalan congress to demand "clarification" of the maneuvers in El Peten from the Defense and Foreign Ministers. Under the constitution, the presence of foreign troops is illegal unless previously authorized by the Congress. The congressional commission decided that the exercises in El Peten merited a series of investigations to determine whether the presence of the US troops affected Guatemala's "active neutrality." Another incident involving US troops in 1988 took place in May when President Cerezo reportedly requested assistance from the US military in combatting insurgent activity. On May 3-4, 18 US military personnel were involved in the transport of over 300 Guatemalan troops to the Playa Grande region of El Quiche department. Three US CH 47 Chinook helicopters, based at the Palmerola air base in Honduras, were utilized in the military operation. (Basic data from back issues of CAU, and reports by the Coalition for a New Foreign Policy, Washington DC)

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