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Deborah Tyroler

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Honduras To Request More U.S. Military Aid If Congress Refuses To Resume Contra Military Aid

by Deborah Tyroler

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In an interview last week in Tegucigalpa with the Washington Post, Honduran military commander, Gen. Humberto Regalado Hernandez said that if the US Congress does not approve more military aid for the contras, the Honduran government will request an increase in US military aid. According to Regalado, Honduras will face a much greater security threat from neighboring Nicaragua if the contras do not resume war. An estimated 11,000 contra fighters and additional thousands of their relatives and supporters are camped in southern Honduras, most in the Las Vegas Salient. After denying the presence of contra camps in Honduras for seven years, late last year Honduran officials began to acknowledge their presence openly. They were described as refugees. At present, said the general, the contras are stable, existing at the behest of \$27 million in US aid. He said that Honduras is waiting on a US decision regarding the contras' future. If the US Congress does not approve more contra military aid, said Regalado, the contras cannot stay in Honduras because its economy cannot absorb them. During a recent visit to Washington, Regalado asked the Pentagon for several CH47 troop-transport helicopters. Equipped with US F-5 fighter jets and 30 UH1H helicopters, the Honduran air force is the most sophisticated in Central America. According to Regalado, Honduras needs helicopters to rapidly ferry troops to its borders. For 1989, \$44 million in military aid was allocated to Honduras, and \$138 million in economic aid. In recent months, both Honduras and Nicaragua have issued numerous protests against each other for alleged small-scale border violations. Both sides have reportedly been maintaining low-level artillery fire across the border. (Basic data from Washington Post, 01/28/89)

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