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On Bush Administration's Plans For Aid To Nicaraguan Contras

by Deborah Tyroler

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At a March 2 hearing of the House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, Acting Asst. Secretary of State Michael Kozak said, "The policy of this administration is to support the regional initiatives for peace...The objectives we are pursuing in Central America are largely commensurate with objectives the Central Americans are pursuing themselves the development of security and peace through the democratic process. These were spelled out in Esquipulas and in subsequent agreements. What has been lacking is a mechanism to insure the accomplishment of these goals." The hearing was called to discuss the FY 1990 security assistance requests for Latin America and the Caribbean. According to Kozak, there are no immediate plans to request military aid for the Nicaraguan contras, but that "meaningful incentives and disincentives" are being developed to encourage Nicaragua to implement pledges made at the Feb. 14 summit in El Salvador. He was referring to talks with legislators by Secretary of State James Baker concerning a request for additional "non-lethal" aid for the contras. When asked about repatriation of the contras, Kozak said that once they have accomplished their goals, "of course they should repatriate. But it's a question of timing, and that has to be worked into the plan." On the possibility of direct US negotiations with Nicaragua, Kozak said, "One of the problems is that it gets you out of phase with your allies in the region. They start [saying]...that you are doing something behind their back, and it's not productive in that respect." On March 2, an unnamed senior White House official told the New York Times that the Bush administration will formally submit a request to Congress in April to continue non-military aid for the Nicaraguan contras. The official said the administration wants to sustain the contra forces to maintain pressure on the Nicaraguan government to implement democratic reforms as pledged under the Central American regional peace accord. The White House official said no decision has been made on the amount of the request. Under the aid package that expires at the end of March, the contras have received about \$27.1 million in "humanitarian" aid. An unnamed State Department official cited by the Times (03/04/89) said that the contra camps in Honduras would probably not be shut down for several months, while the money in question was "not relocation aid." According to the Times, some Democrat members of Congress, Honduran diplomats and Nicaraguan officials argue that the only legitimate use of US aid after the Feb. 14 Central American summit is to relocate the contras. Paul Reichler, a Washington lawyer who has served as an adviser to the Nicaraguan government, was quoted by the Times as follows: "If the administration seeks an extension of the existing law, which provides food, clothing and medical assistance to the contras in their Honduran camps, such a proposal would totally contradict the five-party agreement reached in El Salvador on Feb. 14 and signed by all five Central American presidents." Secretary of State James Baker met March 3 with the Senate majority leader, George Mitchell (D-MA), and with Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT), chairperson of the Foreign Relations subcommittee on Latin America. Baker asked them not to criticize or disclose details of the administration proposal. On Feb. 21, Dodd said that "Humanitarian aid should go for demobilization of the contras," and not to sustain them as a military force. The Times reported that Dodd's aides said he still held that view. Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) said the request for more aid to the contras was "absolutely inconsistent with the

peace agreement by the five Central American presidents...This is little more than a continuation of the Reagan doctrine. Tragically, it suggests that the Bush administration has no new ideas. Baker is looking for a grace period on Capital Hill instead of going to Central America and getting involved in the peace process. The Central American presidents are taking real risks for peace, and we are taking none." An unnamed Honduran diplomat cited by the Times suggested that the existing contra aid program should be extended for three months, until the Central American presidents finish drafting their regional plan. (Basic data from several sources, including New York Times, 03/03/89, 03/04/89)

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