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Bush To Request \$50 Million For Contra Non-lethal Aid; Honduras Asked To Permit Contras To Stay For Another Year

by Deborah Tyroler

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Unnamed administration officials told the New York Times on March 12 that the Bush administration will request between \$49 million and \$52 million in humanitarian aid to maintain the Nicaraguan contras in Honduras at least through February 1990. An unnamed senior State Department official said that if Nicaragua holds "free and fair elections" and if it takes "other steps to democratization," then the US would help resettle and repatriate the contras. The current six-month appropriation of \$27.1 million expires at the end of March. An unnamed Democratic congressional aide said it was "inconceivable that the Central American presidents or Congress would agree to a plan under which no sanctions are lifted and no contras come out of Honduras until after February 1990." State Department officials argue that they can continue spending money for the contras through April 30 if they have made commitments for its use by March 31. Democrats in Congress say any further aid must be consistent with the Central American presidents' plan for dismantling the contras. On Feb. 21, a week after the summit in El Salvador, Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) said that "Humanitarian aid should go for demobilization of the contras," not to sustain them as a military force. Dodd is chairperson of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Latin America. On March 13, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Robert Kimmitt, formally requested that Honduran President Jose Azcona Hoyo permit the Nicaraguan contras to remain in Honduras for another year. Morris Busby, State Department special envoy for Central America, visited Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras last week to describe the administration's plans. He and US Ambassador to Honduras Everett Ellis Briggs participated in the meeting with Azcona in Tegucigalpa. Under the Central American presidents' Feb. 14 agreement, they have until May 16 to prepare a plan for "the voluntary demobilization, repatriation or relocation" of contras now in Honduras. Unnamed State Department officials cited by the New York Times said Kimmitt gave Azcona a comprehensive picture of President Bush's plans for diplomacy in Central America and further aid to the contras. Administration officials argue that the contras' continued presence in Honduras would enhance the prospects for regional diplomacy by keeping pressure on the Sandinistas to hold elections, to permit the contras return and to respect the civil liberties of opposition political groups in Nicaragua. The Bush administration would consider easing the US trade embargo against Nicaragua, upgrading diplomatic relations and taking other conciliatory steps if the Sandinistas keep their promise to hold "free and fair elections," a State Department official said. On March 13, Honduran officials met with leaders of the Nicaraguan Resistance (RN) in Washington to discuss plans for dismantling the contra army. On March 12, Honduran Foreign Ministry spokesperson Eugenio Castro said that his government would be represented by a high-level diplomat, and Cols. Jose Nunez and Luis Velazquez. On March 14, Secretary of State James Baker appeared before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations where he asserted the administration's policy was "quite consistent" with the regional peace agreement. The Feb. 14 summit agreement, he said, "does not mean that we ought to have immediate repatriation" of the contras. Rep. Robert Mrazek (D-NY), said that the contras were living in Honduras "in tent

cities made out of plastic garbage bags." He said he questioned the wisdom of "keeping them there for some face-saving gesture at this point, when the five Central American presidents have taken the lead in suggesting that it's time for them to be repatriated." Rep. David Obey (D-Wisc.), subcommittee chairperson, said Congress disapproved of the Reagan administration's policy in Central America because it was "driven by ideological considerations and a focus on military questions and the contras, as opposed to a broader focus on some of the more overpowering needs in that region." (Basic data from Notimex, 03/12/89; New York Times, 03/13-15/89; Xinhua, 03/14/89)

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