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On Honduran "shift" In Policy Regarding Contras' Stay

by Deborah Tyroler

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According to the New York Times, diplomats have said that under new US pressure, the Honduran government has shifted from supporting the dismantlement of the contra forces and their removal from Honduran territory, to advocating more US aid for them. An unnamed European diplomat with close contacts with US and Honduran officials was quoted by the Times as saying, "They had to adjust their course to the prevailing northern winds. The Hondurans would like to see the contras go, but if they're going to stay, the best they can do is see that they get enough aid to keep them from causing problems here." Under the agreement signed Feb. 14 in El Salvador, the five Central American presidents, including Honduran President Jose Azcona Hoyo, committed themselves to preparing a plan within 90 days that would provide for dismantlement of the contra camps. Washington has argued that the contra bases should remain until after the Nicaraguan presidential elections in February 1990 have been completed. Contra leaders and US officials have said that depending on the nature of the plan for dismantling the contra bases to be prepared by the regional presidents, the contra army could be maintained at least until the February 1990 elections in Nicaragua without violating the Feb. 14 agreement. The Bush administration plan to request new non-military aid for the contras when the current \$27.1 million appropriation expires at the end of March. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Robert Kimmitt, informed President Azcona of administration intentions during a visit to Tegucigalpa on March 13. Honduran official statements have asserted that the government "has not received any type of request" to maintain the contra forces on national territory. A separate official communique on March 20 distanced the government from recent statements by the Honduran Ambassador to Nicaragua, Efraim L. Gonzalez, who suggested that the contras would remain in their Honduran camps through January 1990. Foreign diplomats in Honduras, however, say that after Kimmitt's visit Honduran officials shifted in favor of a policy called "simultaneity," which would permit the contras to stay until Managua fulfills its commitment to free and competitive elections by February. Last week, President Azcona said that new humanitarian aid for the contras would be necessary to prevent them from posing a security threat to Honduras. During the Reagan-Bush administration transition period, Azcona reportedly was able to use the Feb. 14 accord as a means to share responsibility for removing the contra bases while also avoiding direct confrontation with the US. During the years of war between the Nicaraguan government and the contras, the US dramatically increased economic and military aid to Honduras. When the Bush administration was able to assert its policy on more contra aid, the Honduran government has returned to its former position. (Basic data from New York Times, 03/23/89)

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