

3-29-1989

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Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "U.S. Says No Contra Military Operations, Cuts Support Payments To Leaders, Urges Return To Nicaragua." (1989). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/2878>

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U.S. Says No Contra Military Operations, Cuts Support Payments To Leaders, Urges Return To Nicaragua

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, March 29, 1989

On March 16, an unnamed senior administration official cited by the Miami Herald (03/17/89) said Washington will no longer support contra military operations inside Nicaragua. The official's statement was confirmed by two contra leaders. According to the official, instead of support for military actions, the Bush administration has opted for peaceful civilian activity inside Nicaragua in the hope of challenging and perhaps terminating Sandinista control of the government. Nicaragua's next presidential election is scheduled for February 1990. Contra leader Alfredo Cesar told reporters that combatants are "benched for now." Cesar said he was one of six contra leaders who learned of the new policy on March 14. According to a report by the New York Times (03/29/89), the Bush administration is encouraging contra leaders based in Miami to return to Nicaragua to participate in the 1990 elections. An unnamed administration official said, "What our whole policy is about is bringing leverage to bear on the Nicaraguans to see that they comply with the promises they have made to implement democratic reforms. We are trying to open space in Nicaragua so that a peaceful political process can unfold. Encouraging the contra leadership to go back and engage in political activities is the best way to see whether the Sandinistas are really ready to comply." Another element of the same policy is the Bush administration's "urging" the contra leaders to suspend political activities (lobbying) in Washington, Latin America, Western Europe, and elsewhere, while focusing their efforts on Managua and the election campaign. The official said that the administration has informed the contras that it did not wish to "twist their arms" into going back to Nicaragua but to create the kind of conditions there which would make it possible for them to "voluntarily" reintegrate themselves. Meanwhile, the administration has reduced the allowance it had been providing to the contras for their operations in Miami. This funding is separate from the humanitarian aid currently channeled to the contra fighters in Honduras, and aid included in the recently announced "bipartisan accord." Contra leader Alfredo Cesar told reporters in Miami that the Bush administration had cut a \$400,000 monthly stipend to contra civilian leaders by over half, and eliminated payments for all contra political operations. Cesar is a senior member of the Nicaraguan Resistance. Cesar confirmed reports from Washington that administration officials were urging contra political leaders "to return to Nicaragua to enter the political process there." According to Cesar, such pressure "would have been unthinkable only a month ago." Contra offices in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Honduras and Venezuela are to be closed down, Cesar said. A magazine put out by the Nicaraguan Resistance, a costly publication with small circulation, may be phased out, and the operations of "clandestine station" Radio Liberacion will be reduced. More than 100 of the 190 employees on the Resistance payroll will be laid off, Cesar said. Cesar told reporters that the monthly payment of \$350 in "family support" to each of the contra officers would continue. He added that humanitarian aid to the contra rank and file was agreed on in part to prevent them from coming to the US, or at least to persuade them to postpone their decision to do so for a year. Cesar said he intends to return to Managua next May, and that at least two of the seven contra political directors were considering the same move. Next, according to Cesar, former contra leaders Arturo Cruz, Alfonso Robelo and Eden Pastora have also expressed plans to return "if the Sandinistas

continue opening political space." (Basic data from Miami Herald, 03/17/89; New York Times, 03/29/89)

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