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Nicaraguan Reaction To U.S. Accord On Contra Aid

by Deborah Tyroler

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At a press conference in Managua on March 24, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Alejandro Bendana Rodriguez denounced the US "bipartisan" agreement on more aid to the contras, asserting that the plan violates the Feb. 14 Central American summit agreement calling for dismantlement of contra bases in Honduras. Bendana said, "The sum of the agreement is that the contras have got to go as a military force there's no turning back on that. The United States Congress and the American Presidency cannot have the contras as a military force on one end and pretend to be supportive of the Central American peace plan on the other." Bendana stated that he hoped the aid would be defeated in the US Congress out of "self-respect, international law, and a minimum regard for the agreement signed by five presidents, including some of the US's closest friends." Under the Feb. 14 agreement, the five Central American presidents must agree within 90 days on "a joint plan for the voluntary demobilization, repatriation or relocation" of contra fighters. The accord also prohibits aid for irregular forces like the contras, "with the exception of humanitarian aid that contributes to the goals of this document." Bush administration officials have argued that, depending on the nature of the dismantlement plan, the contras could be maintained for some time without violating the agreement. The Nicaraguan government has stated that the dismantlement of the bases must begin "on the 91st day." On March 26 during ABC news program "This Week," Bendana countered statements by Secretary of State James Baker on the rationale behind Washington's new accord, and the possibility of a request for more contra military aid if the situation "deteriorates" in Nicaragua. Bendana said that if Washington stopped aid to the contras, there would be "a logical correlation" with Managua scaling back its own military defense. Shortly before his interview from Managua via satellite was cut off, Bendana said: "What we hear from Washington is keeping the contras intact. If you keep the contras intact, you are keeping alive and intact the possibility of war." On March 27 in a speech to a small group of foreign visitors, President Daniel Ortega described the US accord on contra aid as an affront to international law. After reading aloud from a copy of the accord announced March 24 in Washington, Ortega said, "This is a text that reaffirms the policy that the strong may do whatever they wish, regardless of the will of others." Ortega said Washington had violated an agreement reached by he and four Central American colleagues on Feb. 14, calling for the dismantlement of contra forces. Under the same accord, Nicaragua agreed to organize a variety of political reforms, and advanced the presidential elections to February 1990. Next, the president asserted that the US had forced the contras on the Honduran government. "Have they asked permission or authority from the government or president of Honduras? From the people of Honduras?" Ortega asked. "The Honduran Government says they have not." Under the US plan, the contras would receive \$4.5 million a month in food, clothing, shelter and medical supplies through February 1990. Describing projects that a similar amount of money would finance in Nicaragua from building 9,000 new homes to assisting war victims Ortega said the package was yet another plan for renewed conflict and further bloodshed. (Basic data from New York Times, 03/25/89, 03/28/89; AFP, 03/26/89; Xinhua, 03/28/89)

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