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Gorbachev On Central America, U.S. Government Response

by Deborah Tyroler

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In his April 4 address to the Cuban National Assembly, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev denounced US policies in Central America, and said the recent agreement between Bush and congressional leaders to continue aid to the Nicaraguan contras was "regrettable." During his speech, Gorbachev said: "Favoring greater cooperation with the countries of Latin America, the Soviet Union is not looking for any political or military and strategic benefits in the Western Hemisphere. We believe that continent, like all others, should not be an arena for conflict between East and West. The Soviet Union has no and does not intend to have naval, air force or missile bases in Latin America, or deploy nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction there." The superpowers, said Gorbachev, should renounce military intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean and make the region a zone of peace. The Soviet Union said Moscow opposes the "export of revolution or counterrevolution or any kind of foreign interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states...Only by stopping this can regional conflicts be settled and the possibility of their re-emergence in the future be excluded." Next, Gorbachev reiterated Soviet support for efforts to bring peace to Central America under regional peace accords, and criticized the US for continuing aid to the Nicaraguan contras. "The situation (in Nicaragua) will greatly depend on the position of neighbouring states and the position of the United States," he said, adding that the countries of Central America had a right "to decide on their own destinies." On April 5, White House spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater told reporters: "We listened carefully to what President Gorbachev had to say in Havana yesterday. While the words about not exporting revolution are welcome, they are not matched by deeds which would give those words credence. "Today we call upon the Soviets to cut their half-a-billion annual military aid to Nicaragua. It is a key issue in resolving the conflict in Central America." The White House spokesperson said that while the US was not providing military aid to the Nicaraguan contras, "the Soviet bloc, particularly Nicaragua and Cuba, continue to supply military and logistical support" to leftist anti-government forces in El Salvador and elsewhere in Central America. Fitzwater added, "As the President and the Secretary of State have said, we reject the idea of equivalence between legitimate US interests and the Soviet presence in Central America." [Basic data from AP, 04/04/89; AP, AFP, DPA, 04/05/89; New York Times, 04/06/89]

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