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## **Gorbachev Says Soviet Military Aid To Nicaragua Cut Off In Early 1989**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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On May 15, a US official who requested anonymity, told AFP that in a letter Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev told President Bush the USSR halted weapons shipments to Nicaragua at the beginning of the year, and would not resume arms shipments to Managua. The official said Secretary of State James Baker confirmed the weapons cutoff when he visited Moscow last week for talks with Soviet counterpart Eduard Shevardnadze. The unidentified official added that the cutoff did not pertain to other military assistance, such as vehicles, supplies and clothing. US officials estimate Soviet military aid to the Nicaraguan government last year totaled some \$500 million. Since 1981, the Nicaraguan government has been fighting the US-financed contra army. On May 16, White House spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater said there was evidence that Soviet arms were still being shipped to Nicaragua. According to Fitzwater, it was unclear whether the continued shipments of weapons was an act of deception or whether the arms arriving were already in the pipeline before it was closed. Fitzwater said Gorbachev was using a "drugstore cowboy" approach, saying that he had not matched "words with deeds" and that he was playing "a p.r. game." According to Fitzwater, "It will take some months to confirm if these shipments reflect previously approved material in the pipeline or a continuation of Soviet bloc aid levels since military shipments can truly be delivered through third countries in order to disguise their true origin." Unidentified administration officials quoted by the New York Times said Gorbachev had sent a private letter to Bush this month saying the Soviets had halted arms shipments to Nicaragua, in response to a March 30 letter from Bush saying a halt in military aid to Nicaragua would be a significant step in easing East-West tensions. The officials said Soviet shipments were still arriving in Nicaragua. At a press conference in Managua, Nicaraguan Deputy Foreign Minister Jose Leon Talavera asserted that the military relationship between the USSR and Nicaragua was the legitimate prerogative of two sovereign countries. He said he would not comment on the reported contents of the Soviet leader's letter. Talavera said, "We do not yet have copies of this supposed letter. I have seen only vague cables based on an article in a North American newspaper, and we would like to have more information so that we can react with more care on such an important topic." On May 16, the Pentagon said the Soviet bloc nations had supplied \$2.8 billion in aid from July 1979 to March 1989. (Basic data from AFP, 05/15/89; New York Times, 05/17/89)

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