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Soviet Officials Make Public Statement On Halting Weapons Shipments To Nicaragua

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For the first time, on May 18 Soviet officials publicly declared that Moscow has halted weapons shipments to Nicaragua. At a regular news briefing in Moscow, Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Vadim Perfiliev said, "The United States is very well aware that the Soviet Union is exercising a certain restraint, and in fact for a certain time has not been shipping any armaments to Nicaragua." (See also CAU 05/17/89.) Yan A. Burlyai, an official in the ministry's Latin America department, confirmed Perfiliev's statement. He added that shipments of food, medicine and bandages to Nicaragua could not be properly considered military assistance. On the same day in Niquinohomo, Nicaragua, a reporter asked President Daniel Ortega about Soviet shipments. He replied, "We have normal relations...with the Soviet Union in the fields of economic aid, military aid. The Soviet Union has met all of its agreements with Nicaragua." He added that he is "in favor of reaching an understanding" regarding foreign military aid to Central America under the Esquipulas regional peace pact. Ortega was in Niquinohomo, a small town 20 miles south of Managua, to speak on the 94th anniversary of the birth of Gen. Augusto Cesar Sandino. On May 17, State Department spokesperson Richard Boucher told reporters in Washington that the USSR may have halted arms shipments to Nicaragua, but weapons were continuing to arrive from Cuba and Moscow's East European allies. He said the level and pattern of arms shipments through April was similar to that of last year. According to Boucher, the Soviet Union and its allies sent 27 shipments of military goods to Nicaragua through April. (Basic data from AP, 05/18/89)

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