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Recent U.S. Congressional Actions On Aid To Guatemala: Notes

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Category/Department: General
Published: Friday, May 19, 1989

On April 12, the House Western Hemisphere subcommittee approved the Bush administration's $157.5 million request for aid to Guatemala for FY 1990 and 1991. Approved aid by category and amount follows: foreign military sales (FMS), $9 million; international military education & training (IMET), $0.5 million; economic support funds (ESF), $87 million; development aid, $35 million; and, PL Title I and Title II food aid, $26 million. The following conditions and restrictions were attached: (a) military assistance (excepting IMET) is limited to $9 million per year; (b) military aid must be non-lethal, and lethal equipment may not be sold to Guatemala by US private companies or the US government; (c) President must deliver an annual report to Congress on conditions in Guatemala (e.g., civilian authority, political pluralism, human rights) before military aid may be obligated. (d) sense of Congress with respect to importance of addressing rural poverty; (e) economic and food assistance (1) may not be used in connection with forced relocation, participation in civil defense patrols, or political mobilization and propaganda; (2) shall be used only for programs and projects independent of military operations; and (3) must be channeled through PVO's to the maximum extent practicable. (f) a study of the military justice system in Guatemala and a report to Congress; and, (g) assistance for Guatemala must include assistance for the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman. The bill also states that: (a) military aid accounts may not be used for police aid for El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras during FY 1990 and FY 1991; and, (b) aid will be suspended to any country in Latin America or the Caribbean where a military coup occurs. Guatemalan Defense Minister Gen. Hector Gramajo visited Washington in early May to lobby members of Congress on the importance of military assistance. He was reportedly willing to drop a pending request to purchase an A-37 combat plane from the US Air Force and accept the prohibition on sales of combat aircraft if Congress permits weapons sales to Guatemala by US private companies. Gramajo wishes to purchase an additional 16,000 M-16 rifles to supplement 20,000 rifles purchased from Colt Industries in 1988. A vote on the Foreign Aid Authorization bill by the House Foreign Affairs Committee was expected the week of May 15. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee may vote on the bill after May 15. [The Commission on US-Latin American Relations, a project of the International Center for Development Policy, endorsed US "non-lethal" military aid to Guatemala in a March 1989 delegation report on US military assistance to Guatemala. President Vinicio Cerezo's government, the report notes, "appears to be only a caretaker administration lacking the will to act decisively on behalf of equitable development," yet the Commission "encourage[s] the continuation for fiscal year 1990 the current level of $9 million in non-lethal US military assistance, restricted to communications equipment, medical supplies and human rights and logistical training." (This is done) "to support those officers who have committed the military to back democracy. "The objective conditions for revolution have existed for decades," and despite three years of civilian administration "none of Guatemala's profound structural problems are being adequately addressed," the report said. "Guatemala's military remains the most powerful sector in Guatemalan society," and "the number of political killings and disappearances attributable to government forces or death squads has increased dramatically since 1987." If during FY 1990
"progress is not made towards ending human rights abuses by the Guatemalan military,...then the United States should end all military assistance and prohibit any further commercial arms transactions." [Basic data from 05/09/89 report by NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala, Washington DC)]

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