

Guatemalan & Nicaraguan Presidents: Continued Contra Presence In Honduras Threatens Stability In Central America

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In an interview with the New York Times on Sept. 26 in New York, Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo warned that if the US fails to encourage the Nicaraguan contras' rapid repatriation, they may remain indefinitely in Honduras, and become a "destabilizing element in Central America." During an address to the UN General Assembly, Cerezo pointed out that the five Central American presidents are committed to speeding the return of the contras under the Aug. 7 summit accord. Guatemala would be prepared to give permanent homes to a few of the contras, he said, but many would probably attempt to obtain refugee status in the US. On the same day in Managua, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega told reporters that the contras are selling weapons to rightwing groups in Guatemala. He mentioned the escalation of political violence in Guatemala, including numerous bomb explosions in the capital city, and increased death squad activity against university students, and human rights activists, among others. Ortega added that the continued presence of the contras in Honduras will increase instability throughout Central America. Earlier this year the US Congress approved \$49 million in contra aid to be spent by next February. Under an agreement with the congressional leadership, the Bush administration is obligated to first consult Congress before spending more money on the contras after Nov. 30. As a result, Congress has the opportunity to insist that the \$10 million to \$15 million remaining in the fund at the end of November be used to assist in the contra demobilization process as specified by the Central American presidents, rather than maintaining them in Honduras. (Basic data from Xinhua, 09/26/89; New York Times, 09/27/89)

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