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On U.S. Senate Approval Of Increased Military Aid To El Salvador & Reactions

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Sept. 20, the US Senate voted to increase aid to El Salvador to $90 million, and remove restrictions on access. By a 67 to 33 vote, the senators removed a provision from the FY 1990 foreign aid bill that would have cut the aid into three portions to be sent at four-month intervals and would have given Congress what amounted to veto power over the final installment. Minutes later, the senators approved 82 to 18 a substitute provision that would increase the military aid from $85 million to $90 million and offered rhetorical praise for peace talks between the Salvadoran government and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). On Sept. 22 in San Salvador, President Alfredo Cristiani said the US Senate vote on military aid, and the large margin of votes in favor, constituted a demonstration of confidence in his government. He said US military aid is justified as long as the rebels refuse to disarm and join the country's "democratic process." In statements to reporters on Sept. 24, Archbishop of San Salvador, Arturo Rivera y Damas, denounced the approval of more US military aid for El Salvador. He said the aid will not enhance prospects for ending the war through dialogue. Rivera y Damas warned that "ultraconservative" sectors could block dialogue with the rebels. The existence of such sectors within the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) "is nothing new," said the archbishop. It is necessary, he added, to support President Cristiani in his efforts to organize and promote peace talks. The archbishop condemned the capture of over 100 union members in the past week. Next, Rivera y Damas denounced the assassination by former members of the armed forces of an entire family in the village of Llano los Pasos, La Union department. The archbishop's Sunday homily was cancelled to demonstrate his opposition to the placement of a 20-meter FMLN banner above the cathedral's main entrance. The banner was hung by a group of rebel war wounded who have occupied the cathedral for over a month. The occupation was undertaken to pressure the government to honor the Geneva Convention by authorizing them to seek medical treatment abroad. On Sept. 25 in Mexico City, Mario Lopez, member of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front's (FMLN) political and diplomatic commission, told reporters that the rebels may withdraw their decision to terminate economic sabotage due to the Salvadoran military's stepped-up repression. He enumerated several recent actions by the armed forces, including the arrest of over 100 labor union members, and the bombing of three villages. Lopez said he was concerned about the US Senate's decision to not only continue large-scale military aid to the Salvadoran government, but to increase it, and to remove all conditions. He said the decision will only provide further incentive to El Salvador's "most recalcitrant" sectors who favor a military solution, while weakening those supporting negotiations.

(Basic data from AP, 09/20/89; Prensa Latina, 09/22/89; Notimex, 09/22/89, 09/24/89, 09/25/89)

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