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Nicaragua: More On Soviet Military Aid Question

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After first disputing reports that the Soviet Union had cut military shipments to Nicaragua, US intelligence officials said last week that total Soviet bloc military aid to Nicaragua was about 20% less than it was last year. In the past, the US government estimated the total value of Soviet military aid to Nicaragua at an average of $500 million a year. In its Oct. 16 issue, the New York Times cited "foreign experts" in Managua saying that they believed the USSR would continue current levels of economic aid to Nicaragua. According to statistics released recently by the Nicaraguan Ministry of External Cooperation, Soviet non-military aid from 1981 to 1988 totaled $2.9 billion. The current three-year aid agreement provides a total of $1.4 billion in non-military aid. In numerous statements, Soviet officials have said Nicaragua has not received direct military shipments from the USSR since Jan. 1. [Ed. notes: According to rumors circulating in Managua and elsewhere, the Nicaraguan government requested that the Soviet Union halt weapons shipments. First, the number and strength of contra attacks had significantly declined. Second, the government in Managua assumed that the Bush administration would use Soviet military aid as further justification to continue support for the contras, as well as for rallying Central American allies to endorse more US funding to maintain the contra army, among other types of aggression. At the time of the Nicaraguan request that the Soviet government suspend weapons shipments, plans were underway for advancing the general elections and inviting a variety of foreign observers to monitor the electoral process.] During Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's recent visit to Managua, the Nicaraguan government formally articulated commitment to a suspension of all new Soviet military supplies until the February elections. The Soviet Union and Nicaragua declared support for a regional framework for removing military bases, prohibiting the presence of foreign military advisers and reducing arms levels under a joint Soviet-US structure. State Department officials immediately dismissed any suggestion that the Soviet Union may have a direct role to play in overseeing regional affairs. The Monroe Doctrine rejects the intervention of outside nations in the hemisphere.

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