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U.S. Withdraws Ambassador From Guatemala

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 5, State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler told reporters that US ambassador to Guatemala, Thomas Stroock, had been requested to return to Washington. She said, "Guatemala's democracy continues to be challenged by acts of terrorism and human rights abuses perpetrated by extremists who seek to undermine the democratically-elected civilian government." Tutwiler added that the assailants had not been brought to trial and thus, it was necessary for the US to "review the situation." On March 6, Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo accused the US of intervening in his country's domestic affairs. "It is typical that the United States is displeased when a government attempts to adopt decisions of greater independence and autonomy. But I do not believe that we will reach any type of breakdown in relations..." Cerezo admitted a resurgence of certain "problems" within the past year, and said, "We cannot deny that a Socialist International leader (Hector Oqueli) was assassinated here, and that they have attempted to transform Guatemala into a drug traffic bridge." Cerezo said that Washington is alone in asserting that Guatemala has the capability, but not the will, to control drug trafficking and terrorism. The president said he also found questionable certain press reports on the quantity of US aid channeled to the Guatemalan police to fight crime. Cerezo asserted that Washington is displeased with Guatemala because in the past four years his government has maintained an attitude of independence and autonomy in terms of the regional peace plan," among other things. [In recent months, Ambassador Stroock had delivered strong public criticisms of Guatemala's deteriorating human rights situation. President Cerezo accused Stroock of intervening in domestic affairs and requested that he consult Washington to determine if such criticisms constituted the State Department's official line. Embassy spokespersons later told the local press that Stroock had faithfully represented the principal concerns of the US government about Guatemala. In late November, Stroock accused former Col. Hugo Moran Carranza of links to the drug trade. President Cerezo requested concrete proof against Moran Carranza, who is a former chief of the presidential office administration and current director of the state-run Santo Tomas de Castilla port company. Stroock reiterated his statements about Moran Carranza, and said the case was closed. Early this year in his annual report on state of the republic, President Cerezo "forgot" to include US economic assistance in a document containing aid to Guatemala from all governments and multilateral organizations. On Feb. 20, Cerezo described US foreign aid cutbacks to Central American countries as "totally incongruous" with Washington's constant public pledges of supporting the consolidation of democratic processes in Latin America and Central America. In the case of Guatemala, US aid fell to \$120 million in FY 1990 from \$150 million in the previous fiscal year. Military aid dropped from \$9.4 million to \$3.2 million. Stroock reminded Cerezo that since "democracy was reestablished" in Guatemala, the US has provided some \$800 million to his government, and over 90% of the total was in the form of donations. On Feb. 27, Stroock said that human rights abuses occur almost every day in Guatemala. Meanwhile, the authorities have not yet captured and prosecuted the perpetrators in any of these cases. The ambassador warned that relations between the two countries would inevitably be damaged if abuses continue.] (Basic data from DPA, 03/05/90; Notimex, 03/04/90, 03/06/90)

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