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Deborah Tyroler

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Contras Infiltrating Nicaragua, Fighting Continues; Barrios De Chamorro & Washington Call For Dismantlement

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 16 in Managua, president-elect Violeta Barrios de Chamorro reiterated a call to the contras to immediately disarm and return to civilian life. She spoke to reporters after a nine-day stay in Houston, Texas, where she received treatment for an injured knee. Also on Friday in Washington, Vice President Dan Quayle met with three contra leaders, and urged them to disarm and assist the new government in Nicaragua. The contras were praised for their "valiant efforts" against the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). One of the contra leaders, Israel Galeano Cornejo ("Commander Franklin"), said his forces would agree to disarm if the Sandinista Popular Army does the same. He added, "What we need is total disarmament." On March 17, Honduran military chief, Gen. Arnulfo Cantarero said the army is prepared to forcibly disarm the contras camped along the Nicaraguan border, echoing a statement made by President Rafael Callejas on Friday. The general said he also supports requesting Washington for \$9 million to compensate for damages caused by the contras in El Paraiso department. Unidentified informed sources in Washington cited by AFP and AP said that since just before the Feb. 25 elections, some 1,500 armed contras had left their camps in Honduras to join 3,500 already in Nicaragua. Authority to spend new funds to support the contras ran out Feb. 28. Meanwhile, the US Agency for International Development is continuing to provide cash for food to the contras camped in Honduras and inside Nicaragua from money already in the AID pipeline. In a March 20 report, the Nicaraguan Defense Ministry said contras launched four attacks in Jinotega department last week, resulting in the deaths of six contras and two government soldiers. The attacks occurred March 16 and March 18 in the border communities of Santa Cruz, Bramadero Abajo, La Loma and El Mojon, the ministry said. A Defense Ministry official said the contras "continue to violate the cease-fire" and show no signs of demobilizing. (Basic data from AFP, 03/16/90, 03/20/90; AP, 03/16/90; Xinhua, 03/17/90, 03/18/90; New York Times, 03/19/90)

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