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Nicaragua: President Chamorro To Veto Legislation Approving Extra Cut In Military Budget

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Nov. 14, President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro submitted a 1991 fiscal year budget proposal to the National Assembly for a total of nearly \$500 million. Spending for the military was set at \$78.6 million. The 51 deputies pertaining to the National Opposition Union (UNO) coalition insisted on a further \$19 million cut. The 39 deputies representing the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) indicated they would accept a cut up to \$6 million. On Dec. 14, by a vote of 51 to 39 the Assembly approved a \$59 million military budget. President Barrios de Chamorro vowed to veto the measure. On Dec. 19, the president acted on her promise, but offered an additional \$8.5 million cut, and announced that the armed forces would be cut by another 3,000 troops in 1991. She argued that such a deep reduction in military spending endangered her plans for an orderly and gradual demilitarization aimed at the creation of a public police force on the Costa Rican model. The president pointed out that in April when she took power, military troops numbered 79,737. Since then, the total has dropped to 28,434. Under the administration's new military budget proposal, 1991 spending comes to \$69 million, which represents a 56% decline compared to the \$177 million spent in fiscal year 1990. According to Barrios de Chamorro, the UNO coalition's suggested cuts could push the country into "chaos and a bloodbath." Also on Wednesday, about 150 (of 5,000) recently retired military officers held a march in front of the assembly building to protest the budget cuts, claiming up to 10,000 officers would be fired if the assembly overrides Chamorro's veto. An override would require more votes than the FSLN's 39 deputies. (Basic data from AP, AFP, ACAN-EFE, 12/19/90)

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