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SENATOR FAVORS CONTINUED U.S. SUPPORT FOR CONTRAS  
BY T. LEE HUGHES

Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, a congressional adviser to the president's commission on Central America, said Thursday he believes the "contras" fighting the leftist Nicaraguan government should continue to receive U.S. support.

The Texas Democrat said he met with the "contras," or counter-revolutionaries, during a recent five-day visit to El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras, though he declined to specify the circumstances.

"I was impressed with some of the contras I met with who had been very much opposed to (former Nicaraguan President Anastasio) Somoza, had fought to overthrow him, and felt they'd been betrayed by the Sandinista government" that succeeded Somoza, Bentsen said.

Bentsen said the counter-revolutionaries he met "were intelligent, broad-gauged and totally committed." He also said they were "risking their lives and living under some of the most difficult of circumstances."

Bentsen said there was "no question in my mind" that the counter-revolutionaries were aiming to overthrow the leftist Sandinista government that assumed power in 1979.

However, because of the size of the Nicaraguan armed forces, "I don't think that's realistic that they can overthrow that government," Bentsen said.

According to congressional testimony, the CIA has been providing financial backing for the counter-revolutionaries. The Reagan administration has said it does not want to overthrow the Sandinistas, but wants to prevent them from aiding Marxist guerrillas fighting against the U.S.-backed government of El Salvador.

Bentsen said at least some continued U.S. support of the counter-revolutionaries is justified to put pressure on the Sandinista government to stop assisting the El Salvadoran Marxists.

"I think it's serious pressure on (the Sandinistas) and causes a substantial diversion of their efforts and that it lessens their capability of supporting insurgency in El Salvador," said Bentsen.

"I would not be for cutting off all of the funding because I believe that if you did that you'd lose the bargaining power that you have to try to bring about a peaceful solution....," Bentsen said.

Bentsen said he also met with El Salvadoran President Alvaro Magana and Daniel Ortega, Nicaraguan junta coordinator.

He said Ortega "would not acknowledge" that the Sandinistas were providing support for the leftist guerrillas in El Salvador and contended that "they were just exporting ideas," not arms.

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