

# Against Arms for the 'Contras'

By Dave McCurdy

WASHINGTON — Last July, Congress voted to give \$27 million in humanitarian aid to the "contra" forces fighting the Government of Nicaragua. I was an author of the amendment that provided these funds, but I am nevertheless dismayed by reports that President Reagan has already decided to request some \$100 million in new aid for weapons, ammunition and other military supplies.

This is the wrong time to make such a request. If a vote were held today, military aid to the contras would be defeated on both political and fiscal grounds.

Some skeptics wonder if there really is a significant difference between "humanitarian" and "military" aid. I believe there is. True, the humanitarian aid we allotted was clearly assistance to a fighting force, but the law significantly restricted its use and prohibited distribution by the Defense Department or the Central Intelligence Agency.

More important, the package passed because some three dozen members of the House who had supported the earlier ban on any aid hoped that this might be a stop toward implementing the bipartisan policy recommended in January 1984 by the Kissinger Commission on Central America. This policy — it was named the Jackson plan, after the late Senator Henry M. Jackson — has been endorsed by President Reagan and enthusiastically welcomed throughout Latin America. I believe it still provides our best hope for a lasting peace in the region.

Why? Because the complexities of the conflict demand a complex and carefully balanced solution.

We know, for a start, that the Sandinistas are Marxists, and that their

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## A political solution is still sounder

Government is undemocratic and repressive. To the extent that they export revolution and subversion, and provide bases for Soviet and Cuban military operations, they pose a security threat to their neighbors and to the United States.

Second, the contras have not become a unified and credible democratic alternative to the Sandinistas. They have no political identity in Nicaragua and no meaningful contact with the internal opposition. Nor are the contras an effective fighting force. They are the largest guerrilla movement in recent Latin American history — larger than the Sandinistas were when they seized power — but their 15,000 troops are badly trained, uneducated youths, serving under fragmented leadership.

Third, support for the contras must be seen as an instrument, not a goal, of United States policy. If there is a military component of an aid request, it should be aimed at providing professional training for contra troops, rather than at introducing more weapons into the region.

Fourth, although the Sandinistas profess to support a negotiated solution to the Central American conflict, it is now clear that they will not negotiate unless they are forced to do so by a combination of diplomatic, economic and military pressure. The contras cannot overthrow the Sandinistas, but they can help make such pressure effective.

Fifth, Congressional approval of more money for the contras — including humanitarian aid — hinges on the President's ability to persuade moderate members of the House that he

stands by his pledge, made in an open letter to me in June, that his Administration "is determined to pursue political, not military, solutions in Central America." Both Congress and the public must be convinced that the President has exhausted all diplomatic possibilities for a regionally based political solution.

I believe there should be two components to such a solution.

To begin with, the United States should propose and sign a peace agreement based on the aims of the Contadora countries — Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama — but bolstered by appropriate procedures for verification and enforcement. The proposal should be so reasonable, in Latin American terms, that the Sandinistas cannot reject it without destroying whatever legitimacy they have in the eyes of the world.

Such an agreement must, however, be accompanied by more tangible help — in particular, the full \$1.2 billion in economic assistance suggested by the Jackson plan for fiscal 1987. This is especially important now, since the aid allotted for 1985 and 1986, the first two years of the proposed five-year plan, was 20 percent below the recommended amounts. There is no sense in setting the stage for democracy in the region if we cannot produce an alternative to decades of oppression.

Where will the money come from? The price tag on the 13th Trident submarine is \$1.2 billion. Surely democracy in Central America is more important to our national security than yet another nuclear-powered submarine. □