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NICARAGUA: THE PLOT THICKENS

- Counterrevolutionary Attacks within Nicaragua Signal Regionalization of Central American Conflict
- Seeking to Provoke Sandinistas: Salvador Aid Hard-Sell
- Administration Could Dip Into Emergency Funds for El Salvador

Just as Reagan administration officials are launching their offensive on the Congress in support of a record \$177 million military aid package for the Salvadoran government, Honduras-based ex-Somocista counterrevolutionaries have launched attacks against the Nicaraguan government, advancing to within 60 miles of the capital city of Managua. A spokesman for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) termed the assaults "a possible provocation of the Nicaraguan government--with the tacit approval of the Reagan administration--to attack Honduras as part of the administration's strategy for regionalization of the Central American strife.

"It is necessary for the administration to enlarge the regional conflict in order to sell Congress its military aid package for the beleaguered Salvadoran military," the COHA spokesman continued. "As the risk of all-out war between Honduras and Nicaragua increases, so do prospects of a greater U.S. military presence in the region. This would provide the administration with the opportunity to mop up the messy Salvadoran military situation, as well as increase destabilization efforts against the revolutionary government in Nicaragua."

Twelve hundred Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries--out of an estimated 2,000 to 6,000 based in Honduras-- reportedly supported by a covert CIA-sponsored 19 million operation in Honduras, have attacked towns in the departments of Nueva Segovia, Madriz and Jinotega. The Nicaraguan government claimed yesterday that as many as 200 of the "contras" fought within 60 miles of Managua. According to a Nicaraguan embassy spokesman, the "contras" are surrounded and are expected to surrender in short order.

During a two-hour speech yesterday, Nicaraguan junta leader Daniel Ortega stated that the Honduran military was conducting military exercises along the Honduran-Nicaraguan border as an added "provocation." Ortega warned that if the Honduran military crossed the border, the Nicaraguan army would "respond in

Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.  
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NEGROPONTE REPORTEDLY DIRECTING OPERATION

The U.S. ambassador to Honduras, John Negroponte, is coordinating the covert operations against Nicaragua and directing CIA personnel in Honduras, according to a Nov. 8, 1982 Newsweek cover story. A Dec. 18 Miami Herald article by Juan Tamayo stated that between 125 and 150 CIA personnel were operating in Honduras--about 50 of them from the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa. Honduran military personnel under the command of Gen. Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, who over the course of the past year has displaced civilian President Roberto Suazo Cordova as the real figure of power in Honduras, act as go-betweens for the CIA and the contras. Negroponte, according to one colleague cited in the Newsweek article, "has set out to make a mark in Honduras that will be noticed all the way to the top."

Seemingly in anticipation of a provoked Nicaraguan invasion of Honduras, the U.S., in cooperation with the Honduran military, staged a massive joint military operation, dubbed "Big Pine," within 10 miles of Nicaragua's eastern border on Feb. 1-6. Four thousand Honduran troops, with the assistance of 1,600 U.S. support personnel, were airlifted from Tegucigalpa to the province of Gracias a Dios to respond to an imaginary invasion attempt mounted by a "Red Army." Last July, the U.S. and Honduras staged a smaller, but still impressive rapid-response exercise involving 1,000 Honduran troops who were airlifted to a base in Mocoron, located within the same province.

CONTRA INCURSIONS A REPLAY OF 1954 ARBENZ OVERTHROW

The most recent incursion seems a messy replay of the 1954 U.S.-engineered coup which replaced the democratically-elected, reformist government of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz with that of Col. Carlos Castillo Armas, a militant anti-communist. That coup, also launched from Honduras, owed much of its success to the overwhelming air superiority of the U.S.-supplied invading forces. Honduras currently boasts the largest and most modern air force in Central America. The Honduran air force, bolstered by 18 U.S.-made Army helicopters, six A-37 and six F-86 jet fighter aircraft, far outclasses the Nicaraguan air force, which consists primarily of dated U.S.-made Bell helicopters and trainer fighter-bomber craft. The estimated ground troop strengths of the two countries are 22,500 for Nicaragua and an estimated 30,000 for Honduras.

The Reagan administration has consistently exaggerated the size and capability of the Nicaraguan forces in order to prod Congress into accepting the thesis that the Soviet and Cuba-backed Sandinistas pose a threat to the region that justifies increased U.S. security assistance to the area.

An example of this occurred on March 1, when administration spokesmen stated that the Salvadoran military had only one month's worth of ammunition left with which to combat the rebel movement in that country. Upon inquiry, a Pentagon official later admitted that the administration had based its calculations on hypothetical 40,000-man Nicaraguan invasion of El Salvador.

ADMINISTRATION MAY NOW DIP INTO EMERGENCY FUNDS

President Reagan, citing the increased threat of a regional war, may now roll on up to \$75 million in emergency funds for El Salvador to bail out the Salvadoran military. Under Section 506-b of the Foreign Assistance Act, which allows the President to draw down military aid without congressional approval in the case of an "unforeseen emergency." The administration may try to sidestep opposition on Capitol Hill, verifying Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's February 22 warning that the administration will get \$60 million in emergency funds there "one way or another."

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