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NICARAGUA/
FIGHTING

BROKAW: Again and again we have been hearing from the Reagan administration how Nicaragua's leftist government is supporting the rebels in neighboring El Salvador, and how that is undermining democracy in El Salvador. What has not been known until now is how extensively the government of El Salvador is aiding the United States-backed rebels in Nicaragua. Fred Francis tonight on this connection.

FRANCIS: NBC News has learned that El Salvador, bogged down in a civil war it blames on Nicaragua, is now deeply involved in the administration's efforts to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. Last August, the CIA built a supply depot for Nicaraguan rebels near the city of La Union in southern El Salvador. It is from a secret base here that rebels in Costa Rica get their air-dropped supplies. So across this strategic gulf... (map indicates Gulf of Fonseca) ...weapons now go both ways, Salvador allowing its airfields to be used by American-backed rebels because it believes leftist guerrillas in Salvador are supplied by Marxist Nicaragua. The arms flown out of El Salvador go to Nicaraguan rebel leader Eden Pastora, who has long denied CIA financing. But NBC News has learned that Pastora has been sponsored by Washington for more than two years and now has the support of El Salvador. And Salvador's involvement in the war for Nicaragua goes much deeper. The mining of Nicaragua's ports, supervised by Americans, originated from El Salvador, and the frogmen who laid the mines were Salvadorans. That has infuriated Congress, the use of Americans and Salvadorans for a questionable operation which could have been done by congressionally-financed Nicaraguan rebels. These are rebel frogmen trained by the United States, Nicaraguans who have blown up piers and sown small mines along the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts. (several Latin American frogmen are shown) But they were not used in the CIA's recent, controversial mining. Because of that and congressional outrage, the administration's complicated Central American strategy, in the words of one American diplomat, is beginning to unravel. Fred Francis, NBC News, Tegucigalpa, Honduras.