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4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

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SUBJECT CIA Spokesman Says U.S. Jumped the Gun on Nicaragua

STEVE SCHATZ: A member of Nicaragua's ruling junta says it's better to see the coffee fall than the country, so 20,000 students who would usually help with the coffee harvest have been ordered to take up arms.

Nicaragua insists it's about to be invaded by the United States, and today the Soviet Union's official news agency agrees that Washington is looking for an excuse to invade the Central American nation. The Reagan Administration has denied any such plans and has no comment on claims by Nicaragua a U.S. spy plane has invaded its air space once again today.

CNN's Jay Suber reports now on the source of the controversy.

JAY SUBER: The controversy surrounding the docking of a Soviet freighter in Nicaragua has heightened fears of a U.S. military invasion there as speculation continues to mount that the freighter has a cargo of sophisticated weaponry ranging from MIG fighter jets, helicopters, to surface-to-air missiles.

Following a day of sonic booms over the port city of Corinto and Managua, last night the Sandinista government put 20,000 volunteers on alert.

Nicaragua's Foreign Minister, Miguel D'Escoto, charged that the sonic booms came from U.S. reconnaissance aircraft. The Pentagon issued no comment, and D'Escoto again accused the U.S. of using the ship's docking as an excuse to invade Nicaragua.

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FOREIGN MINISTER MIGUEL D'ESCOTO: The Reagan Administration is not interested in peace in the region. The Reagan Administration is not interested in -- in helping in any way towards a peaceful solution of tensions.

SUBER: But, the U.S. State Department says it is only interested in what the ship is carrying.

JOHN HUGHES [U.S. State Department Spokesman]: There are no plans for an American invasion of Nicaragua. At the same time, we have used serious language in expressing our concern about the consequences of landing in Nicaragua high-speed combat aircraft.

SUBER: While crates could be seen being taken off the Soviet freighter yesterday, U.S. intelligence sources still could not say if they were the type that would contain sophisticated MIG aircraft. The mystery about the ship's cargo is causing a stir between the CIA, the White House and the press.

A CIA spokesman told CNN that the Administration may have jumped the gun when it leaked stories to the press that the Soviets had shipped a dozen MIG-21 fighter planes to Nicaragua.

At best, the information the CIA had at that time was that the cargo was suspicious, but could not confirm that the cargo was MIG aircraft.

The spokesman also said the press has blown the story out of proportion.

Meantime, quoted in a New York Times interview today, Secretary of State George Shultz said the Soviet Union has told the U.S. that it has not shipped any advanced fighter planes to Nicaragua.

Jay Suber, CNN.