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U.S. Trains Antiterrorists

CIA, Military Aid Foreign Squads

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U.S. military and CIA personnel are training antiterrorist units for foreign governments as part of the Reagan administration's stepped-up policy of combating terrorism around the world, according to U.S. officials.

The unpublicized program is designed to increase the ability of allied governments to thwart hostage-taking, airplane hijackings and other terrorist incidents through special antiterrorist squads patterned after the U.S. military's elite Strike Force Delta that carried out a failed 1980 mission to rescue American hostages in Iran, officials said.

The training has been conducted in about a dozen countries, including Lebanon and Honduras, the officials said.

"It's part of a worldwide program," said one U.S. government official. "It's been very successful."

Information on the program was furnished to The Washington Post on a not-for-attribution basis by civilian government officials and military sources after reporters learned of the Honduran training operation. Their descriptions provide a rare glimpse of sensitive operations carried out by the CIA and

the U.S. military in the little-publicized war on terrorism that the Reagan administration has made a high priority of its foreign policy.

The counterterrorist assistance also has included use of U.S. personnel to advise a foreign government while a terrorist incident is in progress. For example, during a recent hostage incident in Sudan, CIA and U.S. military personnel advised the Sudanese and intelligence picked up by U.S. spy satellites was turned over to them. The information helped Sudanese authorities pinpoint the location of the abductors, who were linked to a secessionist southern rebel group.

U.S. personnel also advised Thailand during an airplane hijacking in that country.

It is unclear when the United States began providing counterterrorism training to foreign governments. Some sources said the United States has been providing "security training" to foreign governments for about the past 10 years. But the program clearly has picked up under the Reagan administration.

Officials said the effort is kept secret because individual countries might not want it known that the United States is providing such sensitive aid or might believe that publicizing it could tip off a potential terrorist group. In Honduras, for example, members of a 40-man U.S.-trained antiterrorist squad, the Urban Operations Command, have at times been portrayed as members of a regular internal security force called the Cobras, military sources said.

"It tells people something if they know we have the capability," said one official. "And it might embarrass the host country that we are training them."

The counterterrorist training in Honduras was carried out by U.S. Army Special Forces personnel, or Green Berets, in collaboration with the CIA.

Code-named "Operation Quail Shooter" by the U.S. military, the training was conducted in strict secrecy at the Honduran Army's Special Forces Command at La Venta, a small military installation about 22 miles north of Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital.

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training program at the same time the CIA was directing the covert war against Nicaragua raises new questions about the military's true role there.

Critics of the administration's Central America policy have questioned whether extensive U.S. military activity in Honduras has had the side effect of contributing to Honduran and CIA support for anti-Sandinista rebels headquartered there. They note, for example, that a rebel official has said an airfield at El Aguacate in central Honduras that was improved by the U.S. military has become a base for air supply missions to guerrilla units inside Nicaragua.

The Pentagon, which has been conducting military exercises in Honduras since early 1983, has repeatedly said the military is not involved with the rebels or their irregular war, which was financed by the CIA until a congressional funding cutoff last spring.

However, Barnes said through his spokesman: "It [the training program] demonstrates a direct relationship between U.S. military activities in Honduras and those of the CIA. And it raises a serious question of whether there is other military involvement in other CIA operations" in Honduras.

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