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Secret Curb by Congress on Covert Aid Is Disclosed

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WASHINGTON, May 16 — Congress a year ago secretly restricted the use of covert money for Nicaraguan rebels to supporting operations to intercept shipments of arms to insurgents in El Salvador, according to a report by the House Select Committee on Intelligence made public today.

The report described a running conflict between the committee and the Administration, which it said failed to heed both public and secret limitations on the use of money imposed by Congress and its committees.

The secret limitation, approved by a House-Senate conference in April 1982, was contained in a "classified annex" that accompanied the authorization bill, the report said. At that time, the House intelligence committee considered but rejected legislation to cut off all covert money for the Nicaraguan rebels. Last December, Congress formally adopted an identical restriction prohibiting covert money for the purpose of overthrowing the Sandinist Government of Nicaragua or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras.

Move to End Covert Aid

"Both proved ineffective as moderate curbs on insurgent activity or U.S. policy," the report said. "Hostilities within Nicaragua intensified. There was no discernible effect on the arms flow. Throughout, executive branch officials made little effort to mask U.S. support, going so far in April 1983 as to encourage media discussion."

The report accompanied an amendment to the intelligence authorization for the 1983 fiscal year, adopted earlier this month, which would cut off all cov-

ert aid to the Nicaraguan rebels and instead provide money for "friendly nations" in the region to help intercept the flow of weapons to the insurgents in El Salvador. The report was prepared by Representative Edward P. Boland, chairman of the committee, on behalf of the Democratic majority.

The report traced the committee's hardening attitudes in a conflict with the Administration that began with the first use of covert money for the Nicaraguan rebels.

"From the committee's first briefing, in December 1981, on the program to support anti-Sandinista insurgency, serious concerns were expressed by members of the committee," it said. "These concerns went to the number and tactics of the insurgents to be supported, whether these insurgents would be under U.S. control and the possibility of military clashes between Nicaragua and Honduras."

Five days after the first briefing, Mr. Boland, Democrat of Massachusetts, reiterated those concerns in a letter to "the principal executive branch briefer," the report said. "He emphasized that the concerns were shared by members of both parties and asked that they be addressed by senior policy makers."

Nor did the committee's concerns abate after Congress adopted a prohibition on covert aid for the purpose of destabilizing the Sandinist Government, the report said. "Committee members were expressing renewed distress at the number of insurgents supported by the program, the serious nature of fighting then occurring within Nicaragua, and the lack of success in meeting the program's goals."

"In this period, also, executive branch briefers discussed other goals and gave different emphases to the pro-

gram than those originally described to the committee," the report said.

"The United States has allied itself with insurgents who carry the taint of the last Nicaraguan dictator Somoza," the report said, referring to Anastasio Somoza Debayle, who was overthrown by the Sandinists in 1979. "It has, in effect, allowed the spotlight of international opprobrium to shift from Sandinista attempts to subvert a neighboring government to a U.S. attempt to subvert that of Nicaragua."

On El Salvador, the report said the troubles there "have their root cause in the serious economic, social and political shortcomings of the long-entrenched Salvadoran social order."

"U.S. aid to El Salvador is weighted toward helping to restructure Salvadoran economic, social and political models, but it is a sad fact that such reforms are impractical in a climate of unrest and denial of basic services," the report said. "Both are caused by the activities of Salvadoran insurgents who, unwilling to limit their attacks to military targets, have launched successful and very damaging attacks on the power, water and transportation infrastructure of El Salvador."