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Democratic Liberals in Senate Delay Vote On Increasing Military Aid to El Salvador

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WASHINGTON—Senate Democratic liberals, lacking the votes to reduce new military aid to El Salvador, are exacting a price by insisting on debate that will prevent any final action until next week.

On a 72-23 roll-call vote, the Republican-controlled chamber overwhelmingly defeated the first in a series of amendments to be offered by Sen. Edward Kennedy. But the Massachusetts liberal and other Democrats appear confident they can stall approval of the aid before the weekend.

"We're being pinched," said a State Department official, and Republican leadership sources were resigned last night that no action would be taken before Monday.

"You can table the amendment, but you can't table the issue," Mr. Kennedy said. Fueling the debate is resentment toward the agreement struck last week by the GOP leadership and senior Democrats on a compromise \$61.8 million funding level for El Salvador.

Taken with funds already appropriated for El Salvador, the \$61.8 million increase would bring total military aid to \$126.6 million for fiscal 1984 ending Sept. 30, compared with \$81.3 million in fiscal 1983 and \$82 million in fiscal 1982.

This \$61.8 million proposal represents about two-thirds of the Reagan administration's initial \$92.8 million request. The agreement followed private talks between the administration, Majority Leader Howard Baker of Tennessee, and Sen. Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations. Though Senate Minority Leader Robert Byrd of West Virginia subsequently said he supports the compromise, the agreement irritated party liberals who only hours before had pressed the caucus on the issue and won appointment of a task force to help develop a position.

In an effort to untangle itself last night, the GOP leadership won adoption of the lower \$61.8 million figure on a voice vote. This amounted to only tentative approval since the amendment was treated as a revision in the original text of the bill, and still is amendable next week.

The debate came as Sen. James Sasser (D., Tenn.) released written testimony by the Defense Department disclosing three incidents in the past five months when American troops were fired upon in El Salvador. Though no U.S. casualties occurred, in two cases insurgent forces attacked a San Miguel camp where 22 Army and Navy special forces training personnel are stationed. The

third instance involved sporadic sniper fire at a Salvadoran naval base at La Union, according to the testimony.

Mr. Kennedy has prepared an amendment that would cut funding to \$21 million, but his proposal yesterday was directed at tightening congressional authority over the use of U.S. civilian or military personnel for combat in Central America.

Despite some dispute about the language, he said the provision didn't prohibit the deployment of military trainers and advisers currently in El Salvador. Unlike the War Powers Act, however, it wouldn't have given the president even an initial 60-day period to send troops into hostilities without congressional authority.

As first offered, the amendment applied to American personnel in Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. When this draft was quickly tabled on a 71-20 roll call, Sen. Kennedy submitted a new version modified to drop Honduras. By an almost identical margin, this lost on a direct vote late in the day, with only four Republicans joining 19 Democrats, who were opposed by Mr. Byrd and Mr. Inouye.

The delay is an annoyance for the administration, which still must contend with the Democratic-controlled House. Rep. Clarence Long (D., Md.), chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, is scheduled to leave today for El Salvador and Honduras.

"I'm keeping an open mind," said Mr. Long. "I'm troubled by the aspect of whether any amount of money will do any good."

Though there is speculation that the State Department hopes to strike an agreement with Rep. Long to increase the current level of military aid to El Salvador by \$49 million, the administration said no agreement had been reached.

The Senate floor action came as leading members in both chambers met in a private briefing with a former senior military official in El Salvador. The former official has provoked controversy because of his description of corruption in the Salvador military as well as ties between the CIA and a senior officer allegedly linked to "death squads" operating in the Central American nation.

The official has been talking in recent weeks to reporters and congressmen on the condition that his name isn't disclosed. His credibility has been attacked because of funds he received from a private organization critical of the current policy, yet he still is regarded with interest in Congress. The

former official urged more military aid for El Salvador, according to those present.

But he described wider CIA contacts than previously disclosed with as many as nine to 10 Salvadoran officers on the intelligence agency's payroll, according to sources.

Those attending the briefing were asked not to identify the former officer. But in El Salvador last week, Col. Nicolas Carranza, chief of the Treasury Police, said the accusations were being made by a Col. Roberto Santivanze. Mr. Carranza, who is one of those accused of being on the CIA payroll, denied then that he was a paid informant. As a former head of a secret intelligence unit, Mr. Santivanze had access to information on a range of activity within the military.