

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT
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U.S./NICARAGUA
OVERVIEW

JENNINGS: Well, it's early to tell if the Sandinista proposals for regional peace are more than a public relations job. But they are proposals pushed by other countries in the region, and State Department sources here in Washington do say it's a significant departure from Sandinista positions. Nicaragua was a major topic on Capitol Hill today. Specifically, as ABC's Charles Gibson reports, covert American aid to the anti-Sandinista forces. The session was important enough to be held in secret.

GIBSON: These secret session are not taken lightly. REP. THOMAS O'NEILL (Speaker of the House): According to the rules of the House, the chair is now going to order that the galleries of the House chamber shall be cleared of all persons.

GIBSON: In fact, the House has only held three since the year 1830. The press is kicked out, few staff are allowed, and those that do stay have to sign a notarized oath of silence. The galleries are cleared and the doors are locked. They stay that way. The issue is H.R.2760, a prohibition on covert assistance for military operations in Nicaragua. The bill would cut off secret aid to the rebels who are fighting the communist government in Nicaragua. Supporters argue such aid is illegal. But Republicans, like Florida's Bill Young of the Intelligence Committee, have argued such aid to Nicaraguan rebels is not illegal, and for weeks it has appeared the Republicans would win this fight when it came to a vote. But Democrats now claim the tide is turning. O'NEILL: I can see the sentiment gaining in the House to cut off the covert aid.

GIBSON: Liberal Democrats just back from Nicaragua claim Americans have no idea how deeply this country is involved. REP. GEORGE MILLER (D-Calif.): And if Congress does not cut off the funding for this secret war, in fact we will find that Americans can look forward to deepening involvement in the expenditure of billions of dollars.

GIBSON: Even former President Carter in Tokyo today joined the argument. CARTER: Despite semantical denials, the United States is directly and overtly involved in the overthrow of the, of the Sandinista government.

GIBSON: In the secret session, Intelligence Committee Chairman Edward Boland (D-Mass.) contended that what started as a CIA effort to stop the arms flow out of Nicaragua has become an effort to overthrow the government there. The CIA, he contended, is threatening increased aid to the rebels unless Nicaragua will effect reforms. Bill Young (R-Fla.) stated the Republican case, arguing the Intelligence Committee never intended to prevent covert aid to Nicaraguan rebels, and Young contended H.R.2760 will never pass the House, and Senate, and get a presidential signature. Most members said they learned

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