

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-1

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125 U.S. Military Trainers Requested for El Salvador

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The commander of U.S. forces in Latin America said yesterday that he needs 125 U.S. military trainers in El Salvador, more than double the current number, and that leftist guerrillas there could be "under effective control" within two years if Congress provides enough aid.

As he spoke, the House rejected an administration effort to obtain \$117 million in additional military aid to El Salvador this year.

Gen. Paul F. Gorman, head of the U.S. Southern Command, also said in rare congressional testimony that he can "foresee no circumstances" under which U.S. armed forces would be sent to fight guerrillas in El Salvador, despite what he called "the checkered performance" of the Salvadoran armed forces.

Gorman's appearance before the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere came as Rep. Jack Kemp (R-N.Y.)

failed in the House to reattach \$117 million in military aid to El Salvador to the administration's supplemental appropriation request for fiscal 1984.

Kemp's amendment was ruled out of order on procedural grounds. The House then voted 304 to 116 to pass the \$5.4 billion measure, which contains funds for a variety of federal programs, from food stamps to covert aid to Afghan rebels.

But the total is \$1 billion less than President Reagan's request and the measure would provide only \$129.7 million in economic and military aid for Central America, of the \$622.5 million requested. It would give \$25 million in military assistance to Costa Rica, Honduras and Panama.

The Senate has yet to act on the supplemental appropriation.

Gorman told reporters during a break in his House testimony that press reports saying he runs Central American policy are "sheer

bunkum . . . I do what I'm told." In response to questions, he testified that the Salvadoran armed forces "have a heavy burden of foul-ups, screw-ups, misapprehensions and misjudgments to work off," and that the Pentagon's self-imposed ceiling of 55 U.S. military trainers is too few "to get around to all the battalions on even a monthly basis."

He said Congress should consider whether the number is enough to oversee the use of millions of dollars' worth of military equipment that the United States has supplied since 1979.

"There are almost as many GAO [General Accounting Office] people out there in some provinces as we have trainers," he said.

Subcommittee Chairman Michael D. Barnes (D-Md.) asked Gorman how many troops he would like to have.

"I need 125 U.S. trainers, roughly double what I have now," he replied.

Gorman, who had been asked to discuss the nature and direction of U.S. military activity in Central America, told the panel that while the Salvadoran armed forces have increased from 15,000 to 42,000 since 1982, leftist guerrilla strength has risen from 6,000 to between 9,000 and 12,000, "at a more rapid rate than the Salvadoran army."

This is largely because of insufficient resources for training and equipping additional men, he said. If U.S. economic and military aid were supplied at the rate recommended in January by the Bipartisan National Commission on Central America, he said, "within two years we'd have 80 to 90 percent of the country under effective control . . . and the guerrillas' ability to resurge would be severely attenuated."

Rep. Gerry E. Studds (D-Mass.) said the panel was told three years ago that the war would be over in one more year. He asked Gorman

whether he would send U.S. troops to the region if the Salvadoran government appeared to be losing to the guerrillas "and the only way out was to introduce U.S. troops."

"No, sir, I would not," Gorman replied. "The Salvadorans can protect their own government if provided with the resources . . . I can foresee no circumstances that it would be useful for our purposes to introduce U.S. armed forces into that conflict."

Gorman repeated this view when Rep. Stephen J. Solarz (D-N.Y.) asked him to compare the Salvadoran conflict to Gorman's experiences in Vietnam.

"Nationalism cut against the interests of the United States" in Vietnam but does not in El Salvador, despite the history of U.S. intervention in the region, Gorman said. The arrival of U.S. troops could "transform that war into a very different kind of war in which nationalism . . . might cut against us," he added.

Gorman stressed that "the Salvadoran rebel is not a Viet Cong . . . and Nicaragua is not North Vietnam," and that it would be "a serious mistake" to think otherwise. The applicable lessons of Vietnam, he said, "are largely tactical, and where they've been applied I think they've paid off."

During the brief House debate, Kemp and other supporters of the administration position argued that newly elected Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte has enacted democratic reforms, taken control of the military and cracked down on the death squads, as Congress had been demanding. Therefore, they said, Duarte deserved to be given the additional aid.

"It is extremely important that we begin the process of restoring credibility to this new regime," Kemp said. He added that the administration's funding request was in line with the recommendations of the bipartisan commission on the region.

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