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Argentine Defector Tells Of Multinational Plots For Sandinistas' Ouster

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MEXICO CITY, Dec. 1—A man saying he is a defector from Argentine intelligence in Central America, speaking on a videotape shown here, has outlined in detail a complex system of clandestine connections among the Argentine military, the Honduran high command and Nicaraguan exiles seeking to overthrow their country's leftist Sandinista government.

Identifying himself as Hector Frances, of Argentina's "Intelligence Battalion 601," he names scores of alleged contacts in Central America, including one American he describes as having ties to Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.). He also claims that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency is funding these covert operations and describes a plot to kill exiled Nicaraguan hero-turned-rebel Eden Pastora and blame it on the Sandinistas.

Those parts of the tape that could be independently corroborated provide the first small but substantive clues of what was until now the virtually impenetrable Argentine connection in Central America's secret wars.

Other parts of Frances' 70-minute statement echo standard Sandinista charges about U.S.-orchestrated-covert and overt aggression against Nicaragua. There are indications that Sandinista sympathizers, if not the government itself, were involved in its distribution.

Independent sources in Central America and the United States say that an Argentine named Hector Frances, living on a tourist visa in Costa Rica and known to have close ties with anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan exiles, disappeared from San Jose in an apparent kidnaping a little more than a month ago.

According to official Costa Rican sources, that country's police had been following his movements. An official said Frances was known frequently to be in possession of large sums of money that police "suspected he was receiving from his government" and that "with certain regularity, he traveled to Honduras."

Although several men struck Frances and his wife outside their house and threw Frances into a waiting van, the sources said, no one claimed responsibility for the deed and the Argentine Embassy made no representation on Frances' behalf to the Costa Rican government. His wife, they said, has left the country.

Pastora, in a telephone interview from his home in Costa Rica yesterday, confirmed knowing Frances, whom he described as "from Argentine intelligence" and working in Costa Rica with exiled Nicaraguan national guardsmen fighting the Sandinistas.

A senior member of the Nicaraguan Democratic Forces, the principal anti-Sandinista exiles, also acknowledged knowing him.

Nat Hamrick, who is named in the tape as having "ties" with Helms and "opening doors" in Washington for anti-Sandinista exile operations, was reached at his North Carolina home. Hamrick, who said he is "in the lumber business," acknowledged "knowing and liking" Helms and said he had "business" meetings with Frances and rightist Costa Ricans in San Jose. Hamrick denied any political involvement with anti-Sandinista rebels. But, he added, "I sympathize with them and I empathize with them and I hope they overthrow the bastards."

Although the Reagan administration repeatedly has declined public comment on reports that it is engaged, along with Nicaraguan exiles and other Latin American military forces, in a covert campaign to des-

tabilize the Sandinistas, numerous accounts of such activity have been published over the past year.

Last February, The Washington Post reported that the administration had authorized a broad program of political, economic and propaganda activities against the Cuban presence in Nicaragua and the alleged Sandinista supply of weapons to guerrillas fighting the U.S.-backed government in El Salvador.

A further account, published in March, said that Reagan subsequently had authorized, in December 1981, a \$19 million program of indirect CIA covert operations against Nicaragua, including the buildup and funding of a 500-man Latin American paramilitary force to operate out of commando camps spread along the Nicaraguan-Honduran border.

Training for and operation of the program were to be done in conjunction with "friendly" Latin American governments.

Since then, although both governments have refused to confirm that such a program actually was put into operation, anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan exiles operating out of Honduras have claimed a growing string of successful cross-border and internal sabotage attacks against the Sandinista government.

Beyond that somewhat sketchy framework, and a steady stream of accusations launched from all sides, little has been reported.

Three weeks ago, however, two Washington Post reporters received in Washington copies of the same Frances tape shown here yesterday by the leftist Democratic Journalists' Union of Mexico.

The copies of the tape sent to the reporters came from a fictitious suburban address outside Washington. The presentation yesterday took place at the Mexico City office of the Latin American Journalists' Federation.