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Nicaragua: US says arms balance in area 'upset'

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WASHINGTON - Top American intelligence officials charged yesterday that the military buildup in Nicaragua has already "upset the military balance" in Central America and appears aimed at supporting revolutionary movements or threatening direct intervention in the future.

One of the officials, Adm. Bobby Inman, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), said it appears to be following "exactly the same pattern" as occurred in Cuba after the rise of Fidel Castro.

In a briefing at the State Department, complete with aerial reconnaissance photos taken as recently as two weeks ago, officials from the CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) attempted to document publicly for the first time evidence of the military buildup in Nicaragua as well as of alleged Nicaraguan destruction of Miskito Indian villages on the Nicaragua-Honduras border.

Administration officials are expected to follow later this week, possibly Friday, with their long-promised evidence of outside military supplies to the guerrillas in El Salvador and of command and control of their activities from Nicaragua.

The public briefings, which supplement classified sessions on Capitol Hill this week, are aimed at the rising tide of skepticism that the Administration may be overstating the case for Cuban and Soviet interference in Central America.

"I've watched over the past couple of weeks public servants trying to grapple with the difficulty of conveying information while protecting critical intelligence sources and methods," Inman said, "find-

ing that they're standardly greeted with 'How can we believe you unless you show all the detailed evidence?'"

CIA Director William Casey exercised his authority to declassify some of the intelligence in order to make a public case, Inman said.

A series of reconnaissance photos were flashed on a screen in a State Department auditorium and analyzed by John Hughes, a deputy director of DIA who first came to public attention in 1962 when he briefed on photos of Soviet missiles in Cuba.

The photos were detailed enough to show what Hughes described as troops in the field in Nicaragua training with Soviet anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns.

Since the rise of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, Hughes said, regular army garrisons have been expanded from 13 to 49, and 14 new airfields have been built, including four with runways long enough to accommodate MIG21 fighter-bombers.

Inman said the intelligence community believes that Nicaraguan pilots now undergoing "advanced" flight training in Bulgaria and Cuba will return home later this year and that MIG21s probably will be delivered shortly thereafter.

The scope of facilities being constructed, Inman added, probably means that another 50 to 75 Soviet tanks will be added soon to the 25 T55 tanks now in Nicaragua. By way of comparison, he said, Guatemala has only five World War II tanks.

Besides infantry and armored battalion garrisons, which he said were built on the Soviet-Cuban model, Hughes showed photos of a training facility near Managua where he said troops were getting commando-type training in how to attack airfields and destroy planes with small explosive-satchel charges. He noted an effective attack of that sort occurred recently in El Salvador, but he stopped short of tying Nicaraguans to that raid.

In answer to questions, Inman said the scope of facilities under construction suggest plans for a Nicaragua standing military force of from 25,000 to 30,000 men and a militia of 100,000 to 150,000. Such a force, he said, was much larger

than any combination of its neighbors. The intelligence officials said there are more than 6000 Cubans in Nicaragua, including about 2000 military and security advisers. Another 50 to 75 Soviet officers, they said, were on hand to advise senior Nicaraguan military officers on force planning and tactics.

Inman said after a marked difference in tactics during the 1960s when Cuba actively supported guerrilla movements in Latin America while the Soviet Union concentrated on established Communist Party political organizations in the region, the two countries now appear to be coordinating efforts to actively support, supply and advise guerrilla movements.

Asked what was behind the buildup in Nicaragua, Inman said he could recall a time when the United States regarded Castro as merely an "agrarian reformer" and withdrew support from Fulgencio Batista, the Cuban dictator. But when Castro assumed power, Inman said, he built Cuba into a military bastion for the export of revolution in the Western hemisphere.

"I believe we're seeing exactly the same pattern in Nicaragua," he declared.

Hughes showed before-and-after photos of several Miskito Indian villages on the Nicaraguan side of the border with Honduras, which he said showed the systematic burning down of all homes, churches and other structures in January and February. Some 10,000 Indians have been forcibly relocated in Nicaragua, he said, and another 12,000 have fled to Honduras.

Asked why this was going on, Inman said he could only speculate that the Nicaraguans might want to clear the area preparatory to moving a Cuban military unit into a nearby facility under construction.

Other sources suggested the Miskitos had opposed some of the Sandinista programs and the latter may have feared they would make common cause with Nicaraguan exiles in Honduras.

Jaime Wheelock Roman, a member of the nine-man Sandinista National Directorate, which rules Nicaragua, claimed in a news conference last week in Washington that the Sandinista government was