

REUTERS  
5 May 1984

CENTRAL AMERICAN  
WASHINGTON

Sen. Edward Kennedy today said there was a "credibility gap" between what the Reagan administration says U.S. military forces are doing in Central America and what seems to be happening there.

The Massachusetts Democrat, in a new attack on U.S. policy in the region, accused the administration of violating the 1973 War Powers Act and the 1980 Arms Export Control Act "by systematically placing U.S. ships, planes and personnel in harm's way."

Both acts limit a president's ability to deploy troops in overseas combat, and the War Powers Act requires Congress have a role in making such a decision.

Kennedy, in a statement, said administration officials had given different versions of the role U.S. forces were playing in El Salvador and Honduras.

"There is a credibility gap that threatens to poison future debate on U.S. policy in Central America," the senator said.

Kennedy released an exchange of letters between himself and Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger over U.S. activities in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras.

Weinberger said U.S. military in El Salvador and Honduras "are only engaged in training or exercises," adding "at no time have U.S. forces been authorized to take part in or control of combat activities" within the context of either law.

Weinberger also said U.S. military in the two countries "have been given specific orders to avoid situations which would lead to their accidental involvement in hostilities or combat situations."

Kennedy noted U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering's acknowledgement that U.S. military personnel in U.S. aircraft are providing intelligence for Salvadoran ground combat forces.

He also said, "U.S. personnel have been ordered to operate closer than ever, on land, on sea, to combat zones along the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran border."

Kennedy said recent disclosures the Central Intelligence Agency directed the mining of Nicaraguan harbors and last year's attack on Port of Corinto oil facilities are further evidence the United States is headed for war.