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Secret arms bid reported

CIA was proposed to panel as conduit for El Salvador

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WASHINGTON — The Reagan administration has reportedly developed a plan to send some military equipment to El Salvador secretly through the Central Intelligence Agency.

The plan, submitted this month, was blocked by the House Committee on Intelligence, members of Congress and administration officials said.

According to the lawmakers, the committee objected on the ground that it appeared to circumvent aid limits set by Congress. The chairman, Representative Edward P. Boland (D, Mass.), reportedly was angered and told William J. Casey, the director of central intelligence, that the committee would not tolerate the shipments.

The plan came to light yesterday when Representative Clarence D. Long (D, Md., 2d), chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, announced that he had received a letter from Mr. Boland about "CIA arms shipments to El Salvador."

Lawmakers said that the amount of arms involved was not clear but that it involved heavy military equipment, including four combat helicopters.

"While we are sitting up here painstakingly debating how much military assistance to give El Salvador," Mr. Long said in an interview, "the Reagan administration is figuring out how to secretly send everything they want down there. It is outrageous. I won't stand for it."

Mr. Long, who said he was restricted on what he could say about the secret plan, said he had asked for a CIA briefing for today.

Other lawmakers and administration officials later provided details.

The disclosure came as House and Senate members met to try to resolve differences over regular military aid to El Salvador and to Nicaraguan rebels in a supplemental financing bill. The Senate version includes \$62 million for El Salvador and \$21 million for Nicaraguan rebels. The House version provides no aid to either party.

The military equipment the administration planned to send through the CIA would have been in addition to the regular aid approved by Congress. It also would have been in addition to \$32 million in aid Mr. Reagan authorized earlier this year under discretionary powers.

The idea of using the CIA, according to lawmakers familiar with the proposal, was developed as a way of swiftly getting military equipment to El Salvador.

According to the sources, the plan called for the Pentagon to declare some military equipment surplus and to give it to the CIA at a nominal price for forwarding to El Salvador. The monetary value as listed on government ledgers would thus have been much smaller than the actual value.

An administration official said that, because of the objections of the House committee, the proposal would be temporarily set aside.

"Congress has overreacted," he said. "Once we have a chance to educate them on this idea, we may try to submit it again."

Mr. Long said he estimated the actual value of the military equipment at more than \$20 million.

"This administration is playing all kinds of games, and I deeply resent it," Mr. Long said.

Members of the Committee on Intelligence said the panel had objected to the plan in part because, as one member put it, "it proposed an inappropriate role for the CIA."

The members said they thought the timing was especially unfortunate because the proposal was submitted just as Congress was in the midst of debate about aid to El Salvador.