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Moynihan delivers warning on warplanes in Nicaragua

By Thomas D. Brandt
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In a bluntly worded speech Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan, D-N.Y., yesterday warned Nicaragua and the Soviet Union against basing strategic aircraft in Nicaragua which, he said, would turn a Central American "regional crisis into a global one."

Mr. Moynihan, the vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee and sometime critic of Reagan administration foreign policy, made the comments in a prepared speech on the Senate floor that warned in particular against placing the Soviet Backfire bomber, missiles or MIG fighters in Nicaragua.

The senator left no doubt as to the gravity of his warning by drawing parallels with the 1962 Cuban missile crisis "when the world seemed close to nuclear war."

The language in the New Yorker's speech, which his staff said he wrote himself, matched in bluntness some of the harshest rhetoric from Reagan administration officials.

Mr. Moynihan said that the United States, as one of the two nuclear superpowers with "the responsibility to maintain the nuclear peace," would have to stop the Nicaraguans from allowing Soviet use of their facilities.

"The result would be a situation the United States as a responsible world power could not and would not accept," he said. "We would move instantly to reverse it."

A spokesman for Mr. Moynihan would not comment on whether the senator was calling for U.S. military action in such an instance. "You don't play your cards before you have to," he said.

Sen. Moynihan said that the disagreement in the United States over American involvement in El Salvador and Nicaragua would solidify into "near unanimity" of view should Soviet strategic forces appear on the Central American mainland.

The senator cited a Defense Department photograph taken in June of the Punta Huete airstrip, about 20 miles northeast of Managua, that is longer than there is at Andrews Air Force Base and capable of handling any aircraft in the Soviet inventory.

"This is the one event that has occurred in Central America, specifically in Nicaragua, which has the potential of transforming a regional crisis into a global crisis," he said.

Mr. Moynihan believes that the Soviets have no strategic military need for a Central American base, and therefore establishment of such a facility would be an act of political provocation.

A spokesman for the senator said one reason he decided to speak out now was that he felt there was too much public and political focus on the lesser issue of small arms flow from Nicaragua to leftist guerillas in El Salvador, for instance, and not enough attention to the strategic implications of the Punta Huete air base.

"People are missing the forest for the trees," a Moynihan staff official said.

Mr. Moynihan said that in a visit to Nica-

ragua last December his "one primary purpose" was to convey to Sandinista junta members that there cannot be "further extension of Soviet power into the Western Hemisphere."

He said he was assured at the time by junta members Sergio Ramirez and Tomas Borge that "Nicaragua would not permit a Soviet nor any other military base" on their territory.

But he said that the ongoing construction at Punta Huete "leads me to ask whether they understand what I was saying or believed what they were saying."

The senator's office said there had been no immediate response to the speech from the Reagan administration. Sen. Moynihan has been a centrist on Central American foreign policy, according to his advisers, who believes the United States has the responsibility to act in Central America but who opposes efforts to overthrow governments.

In June, for instance, he opposed the administration request for \$21 million more for the guerrillas seeking to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, while supporting a lesser amount to allow the rebels an organized withdrawal.

Mr. Moynihan was known as a militant anti-communist in the 1970s when he served as ambassador to the United Nations.

However, earlier this year he threatened to resign his post on the Intelligence Committee as a protest to the administration's failure to notify the panel of CIA involvement in the mining of Nicaraguan ports.