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# Policy may n reflect tough talk

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WASHINGTON — President Reagan and his inner-circle of advisers have taken direct control of U.S. policy on Central America in a move that may toughen the administration's role in the turbulent region.

A hardened position would be clearly in tune with recent Reagan rhetoric about the priority he places on stopping Marxist subversion in Central America. Since March, the President has made six major speeches that touched on the issue, including an exceptional appearance before a joint session of Congress April 27 in which he warned that the region's violence could threaten "the safety of our homeland."

Speculation that the tough Reagan position will get tougher gained currency May 27 with the ouster of Thomas O. Enders as the State Department's chief Latin American specialist. Administration officials said Reagan personally ordered Enders' dismissal.

Reagan has since stressed that Enders' dismissal as assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs did not mean a change in policy. "Contrary to some reports... we are not changing the policy I outlined to the Congress," he said Wednesday.

But interviews with half a dozen State Department and White House officials indicate that Enders' removal could result in any or all of these developments:

- More active and overt support for pro-American governments in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica, as well as the CIA-backed rebels fighting Nicaragua's leftist regime.

- Preparation of a reluctant American public for increased U.S. military involvement in Central America, perhaps even including the dispatch of U.S. combat troops.

- An end to the interagency feuds on Central American policy that sometimes created the impression both here and abroad that the United States was confused on how to deal with Central America.

- New tactics in dealing with Congress, which has failed to enact Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative, cut part of his requests for military assistance to El Salvador and tried to curtail CIA assistance for anti-Sandinista guerrillas.

- More personnel changes.

The day Enders' departure was announced, the Pentagon and State Department released a strongly worded background paper on Soviet-Cuban-Nicaraguan meddling in Central America. Enders was said to have opposed it as "warmed-up leftovers." At the same time, administration officials announced a decision to send 100 additional U.S. military advisers to Honduras and leaked a proposal to send 20 or 30 others to Guatemala.

Some State Department officials said these developments could reflect a desire on the part of some White House officials to prepare public opinion for an escalation of U.S. involvement in the region.

Hard-line White House and Pentagon officials contend that only an increased and more active U.S. military presence in Central America would check the advance of leftist guerrillas in El Salvador and the growing military buildup in Nicaragua.

Privately, these officials say they believe that only a dramatic increase in the number of U.S. military advisers in El Salvador — from the present 55 to 100 or 200 — will bring about victory.

Some of the Pentagon experts also argue that a limited number of advisers should be given permission to accompany Salvadoran units on combat operations in guerrilla-controlled areas.

This differs sharply with Enders' formula for El Salvador. He sought not a military victory, but only enough U.S. military aid to help the

local government hold off the rebels while it pressed for social, political and economic reforms to eliminate the roots of the conflict.

Although some of Enders' friends believe his removal does not spell any major change in policy — "It can't go any further to the right than it already has," quipped one of them — many say that his departure clears the decks for harder U.S. initiatives.

A State Department source sympathetic to Enders said that "circumstantial evidence" suggests that Reagan may be considering deploying U.S. combat units in Central America — not necessarily in the actual conflicts of El Salvador or

Nicaragua but on the periphery, perhaps Honduras — to act as a deterrent force.

Pentagon sources said that such a deployment would only be likely in the event of war between Nicaragua and Honduras or a dramatic increase in the number of Cuban military personnel in Nicaragua.

A legislative aide to an influential Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee commented that Enders' removal and a Reagan statement May 27 "clearly indicated" to him that the White House was considering deploying U.S. troops.

Although Reagan had steadfastly ruled out the possibility of sending combat troops to Central America, he seemed to change his stance in a chat with reporters just before the Williamsburg summit at the end of May.

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