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Reagan Pushes Policy on Central America But Tries to Avoid Battle With Congress

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WASHINGTON—President Reagan, carefully trying to avoid a new confrontation with Congress, urged approval of his stalled proposals for military and economic aid for Central America.

In a nationally televised address last night, Mr. Reagan warned that communist subversion, spearheaded by Cuban and Nicaraguan surrogates of the Soviet Union, threatened "to destabilize the entire region, and eventually move chaos and anarchy toward the American border."

Mr. Reagan didn't break any new ground. Instead, he sounded familiar themes about the moral and strategic reasons for aiding U.S. friends in the region and halting the advance of communism. Slightly over a year ago, in an address to a joint session of Congress, President Reagan raised many of the same issues. At the time, he was having similar problems winning support for Central American aid.

However, Mr. Reagan chose last night to communicate directly with the American people at a time when the administration is both buoyed by the apparent election of a moderate presidential candidate in El Salvador and faces crucial legislative tests on Capitol Hill.

The administration is expected to use Jose Napoleon Duarte's apparent election to press Congress to approve its request for emergency military aid for El Salvador as well as its broader, long-range aid package for the region. Mr. Reagan didn't refer directly to Mr. Duarte, but he said that "it would be profoundly immoral" not to support "peace-loving friends" in the region.

Mr. Duarte, who is well-known and well-liked on Capitol Hill, also has begun to lobby

Congress for aid. Yesterday, many offices on Capitol Hill received cables from Mr. Duarte saying that "we need adequate economic and military assistance from the American government."

Mr. Duarte referred to himself as "the president elect" even though he hasn't yet been officially declared the winner.

The House is expected to take up, perhaps today, a foreign aid authorization bill that contains provisions for military and economic assistance for the region for this year and fiscal 1985, which begins Oct. 1. Also, a conference committee is expected next week to take up a Senate-approved request for \$62 million in emergency military aid for El Salvador.

Mr. Reagan said last night that the emergency aid is urgently needed because "evidence mounts of Cuba's intentions to double its support" to leftist guerrillas in El Salvador for a fall offensive. A senior official briefing reporters last night said the evidence was based on "reliable, highly credible reports," but said he couldn't cite specifics.

Mr. Reagan chided Congress by saying, "We have provided just enough aid to avoid outright disaster, but not enough to resolve the crisis, so El Salvador is being left to slowly bleed to death."

However, Mr. Reagan, who had a bitter clash with Congress last month when Congress learned that the Central Intelligence Agency had failed to inform it adequately about the agency's support of mining operations in Nicaraguan harbors, avoided direct criticism last night. The senior aide briefing reporters said Mr. Reagan, in preparing the speech, "removed any reference that would

suggest that our problem to date is a result of congressional inaction."

The White House also made a last-minute deletion yesterday of a direct reference to the pressure put on Nicaragua's Sandinista government by CIA-supported insurgents.

However, another senior White House official has said that if Congress doesn't respond to Mr. Reagan's requests, the White House is prepared to blame Congress during the presidential campaign for any problems in the region.

But last night, Mr. Reagan appealed to the bipartisan spirit of Congress. He cited Harry Truman and John Kennedy, and said that Congress had responded overwhelmingly when these Democratic presidents asked for aid to halt communist aggression. Mr. Reagan also reiterated that the administration didn't have any plans "to send American troops into combat in Central America."

In the Democratic response to Mr. Reagan's speech, Rep. Michael Barnes of Maryland jabbed at the administration's support for counter-revolutionary operations in Nicaragua that have prompted a protest in the World Court. "We believe that we most effectively advance our interests when we act in accordance with our nation's highest principles and values," said Mr. Barnes, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs.

Nevertheless, several Democrats who oppose the administration's military aid proposals conceded that the likely election of Mr. Duarte would make it difficult for Congress to hold back aid for El Salvador.