

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A-1

WASHINGTON POST  
10 May 1984

# Reagan Appeals For Extra Aid To El Salvador

By Lou Cannon  
Washington Post Staff Writer

President Reagan last night appealed for increased military and economic aid for El Salvador, saying in a nationally televised address that the United States has both a strategic and moral interest in resisting "communist subversion" in Central America.

Speaking as the House moved toward a vote, possibly today, on additional military aid to the embattled Salvadoran government, Reagan said that the alternative to

continued U.S. assistance "will be a communist Central America with additional communist military bases on the mainland of this hemisphere, and communist subversion spreading southward and northward."

Reagan's half-hour speech was an effort to redefine and regain control over the election-year debate on Central America and to cast his foes as "new isolationists."

Even before he spoke, his congressional opponents acknowledged that he would likely succeed at least in the short run and sway votes in favor of the Salvadoran aid request on the House floor.

House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.), leading opponent of the request, said that Reagan was "a very forceful speaker" and stood a good chance of stopping a Democratic alternative putting restrictions on further aid.

But when O'Neill was asked whether the House would also agree to funds for U.S.-sponsored guerrillas opposing the leftist Sandinista government of Nicaragua, he replied, "I would doubt it very, very much."

Reagan portrayed "communist subversion" as the most important issue in Central America. "If the communists can start war against the people of El Salvador, then El Salvador and its friends are surely justified in defending themselves," he said.

"If the Soviet Union can aid and abet subversion of

our hemisphere, then the United States has a legal right and a moral duty to help resist it . . . . It would be profoundly immoral to let peace-loving friends depending on our help be overwhelmed by brute force if we have any capacity to prevent it," he said.

Reagan said the leftist regime in Nicaragua had, with Soviet and Cuban help, become the main base for subversion and terrorism in the hemisphere and imposed "a communist reign of terror" within its own borders.

He described the U.S.-sponsored guerrillas opposing the Sandinista regime as "freedom fighters." But he did not mention U.S. aid to these so-called contras, and aides said he deleted a passage—which spokesman Larry Speakes had announced would be in the speech—saying that

the contras had exerted "positive pressure" against Nicaraguan aid to leftist guerrillas in El Salvador.

Reagan also made no mention of the right-wing "death squads" in El Salvador, except to say—despite congressional testimony to the contrary—that the "small, violent right wing" in that country was not part of the government.

Covert U.S. aid to the contras and the activities of the death squads are the two most controversial aspects of administration policy in Central America.

Reagan's speech tonight, although similar in tone and content to the defense he made of his policies in a televised joint address to Congress 13 months ago, all but abandoned his recent attack on Congress for supposedly undermining administration policies in Central America and Lebanon.

A senior administration official said that Reagan himself had deleted every critical reference to Congress contained in a draft submitted to him, apparently as part of a "bi-partisan" strategy for dealing with Central America as a national interest rather than a partisan one.

He was also careful to reiterate

that there are no plans for using U.S. combat troops in Central America, a point on which his political advisers are particularly sensitive in an election year.

But Reagan also made clear that he intends to stand by his policies in the region despite surveys that show them to be unpopular. He said, as he has before, that Central America is "of great importance" to the United States, and illustrated his point with a color graph showing that El Salvador is slightly closer to Houston than Houston is to Washington.

" . . . Communist subversion poses the threat that 100 million people from Panama to the open border on our south could come under the control of pro-Soviet regimes," Reagan said.

Underlying Reagan's appeal, said a senior official who briefed reporters on the speech beforehand, was the conviction that the Soviets, having achieved nuclear parity with the United States, were now engaged in "low-order" wars throughout the world at small risk to themselves.

Tracing U.S. policy back to the anti-communist actions of President Harry S. Truman after World War II, Reagan insisted that "subversion" could be stopped, at least in the Western Hemisphere.

"Communist subversion is not an irreversible tide," Reagan said. "We have seen it rolled back in Venezuela, and most recently in Grenada. And where democracy flourishes, human rights and peace are more secure. The tide of the future can be a freedom tide. All it takes is the will and resources to get the job done."

Quoting President John F. Kennedy, who he said understood the problems of Central America and the long-term goals of the Soviet Union, Reagan said that the United States was engaged in "a long twilight struggle" to defend world freedom.

He painted the struggle throughout the hemisphere as one between democracy and communism. El Sal-

Continued