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ON PAGE A-1

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SENATE BILL SEEKS A REIN ON THE U.S. IN LATIN AMERICA

Dodd and Tsongas Urge Prior Congressional Approval for Military Moves in Area

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WASHINGTON, March 12 — Calling the Reagan Administration's policy on Central America "confused and dangerous," two Democratic Senators proposed legislation today to require prior Congressional approval for military action and covert intelligence operations in the region.

The Senators, Paul E. Tsongas of Massachusetts and Christopher J. Dodd of Connecticut, said they would try to attach their bill to President Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative or to any other legislation that offered a chance for quick action.

The measure is the most comprehensive introduced so far with the aim of giving Congress greater control over Administration moves in Central America. It reflects a growing determination on Capitol Hill to check any active intervention by the United States before it goes too far in the view of legislators.

Favorable Political Climate

The two freshman Senators admitted that "under normal circumstances" such restrictive legislation would stand little chance of success. But they said they were counting on the political climate to aid them.

"A vote against this would be interpreted as a vote for U.S. intervention in El Salvador," Senator Tsongas said. "That would be very difficult to do in an election year."

In recent weeks, many lawmakers have said they detected a growing alarm around the country over the Administration's policy toward the region, particularly its vows to protect El Salvador from Communist incursions. "No

question, on this issue the American people are ahead of Congress," Mr. Tsongas said. "We think there's a momentum here."

The sense of concern has produced a number of proposals on Capitol Hill.

Senator Robert C. Byrd, Democrat of West Virginia, has proposed an amendment, for example, that would tighten the 1973 War Powers Act, which now requires the President to obtain Congressional approval within 60 days of sending combat troops to a troubled region. The Byrd amendment would require prior approval.

And last week the House overwhelmingly passed a resolution urging a political solution in El Salvador, where the American-backed junta is battling left-wing guerrillas. A somewhat tougher statement is pending in the Senate.

Human Rights in El Salvador

Under the present law, the President must certify that the junta is improving its human rights policy before El Salvador can receive American aid.

Mr. Reagan made such a certification last month, but Representative Gerry E. Studds, Democrat of Massachusetts, then introduced a bill to reverse it. On Thursday the House Foreign Affairs Committee postponed consideration of the measure.

The War Powers Act, approved by Congress over President Richard M. Nixon's veto, was aimed in part at hastening the end of the Vietnam War, and contained a specific prohibition on American military activity in Indochina after Aug. 15, 1973. It also contains language calling on Presidents to "consult" with Congress "in every possible instance" before sending armed forces into hostilities.

Later, the Ford Administration complied with the War Powers Act by notifying Congress in 1975 that it was taking steps to recover the Mayaguez, an American merchant ship, seized by Communist forces off the coast of Cambodia.

While final details are still being drafted, the proposed amendment announced today would apparently change existing law in at least three ways.

The clause in the War Powers Act which gives the Administration a 60-day grace period before seeking Congressional approval for armed intervention, would be eliminated for Central America.

The Administration would be barred from using funds in the region not specifically earmarked by Congress. Under current law the Administration has a variety of discretionary accounts that can be tapped without specific authorization, and the White House, re-

cently used one to send \$55 million in special military aid to replace El Salvador's battered helicopter force.

A Rein on the C.I.A.

Covert intelligence operations would be subject to some sort of Congressional approval, but the mechanism for that review has not yet been drafted. One idea would be to give veto power to selected committees, including Intelligence, Foreign Affairs and Appropriations. Now the Central Intelligence Agency is merely required to inform Congress of covert operations, "in a timely manner," and the lawmakers have no veto power.

The proposed amendment also says that foreign military sales, economic support funds and the training of Central American forces would be subject to Congressional approval. But the lawmakers have review power over most of those activities already.

"We want to provide a mechanism that gives the Administration pause before it goes ahead and does something," Senator Tsongas said.

Even if the bill does not pass, the lawmakers feel that its mere existence serves a purpose. "We are creating a debate environment," Senator Dodd said. "We are keeping the feet of the Administration to the fire."

Shooting Down 'Trial Balloons'

The two Senators said they decided to move now because they were alarmed by recent reports that the Administration was financing covert operations in Nicaragua. They said they wanted to shoot down any "trial balloons" for future American intervention.

Mr. Dodd conceded that "there is a connection" between the Soviet Union and Nicaragua, but he argued that, instead of pursuing a policy of military intervention, the United States should "offer a better deal" than the Russians through economic and political cooperation.

"Rather than destabilize the Government, why not try to build a relationship there?" Mr. Dodd said.