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ON PAGE 1A

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Democrats ask answers on attack in Nicaragua

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WASHINGTON — Democrats in both houses of Congress yesterday demanded to know whether the U.S. government was involved directly or indirectly in a weekend helicopter and plane attack in Nicaragua in which two Americans were killed.

The Sandinista government, accusing the United States of "state terrorism," yesterday made public a protest letter to Secretary of State George P. Shultz from Nicaragua's acting foreign minister, Jose Leon Talavera, alleging that the United States had provided the helicopter involved in the air attack. Tuesday night, Nicaragua called for a U.N. Security Council meeting to address what it called a "fresh escalation of aggression."

In Washington, in a letter to CIA Director William J. Casey, Rep. Ted Weiss (D., N.Y.), said, "I consider it your responsibility . . . to provide the American public with a full account of direct or indirect CIA involvement with the Americans participating in this weekend's raid."

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D., Vt.) said he would ask the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to look into whether the two Americans took off from Honduran airstrips built or controlled by the U.S. government.

Senate minority leader Robert C. Byrd (D., W.Va.), when asked whether he was satisfied with administration explanations that the U.S. government had nothing to do with the mission of the two Americans, said,

"I have no way of knowing except from news reports."

Leahy, a member of the intelligence panel and a critic of the Reagan administration's Central American policy, said administration officials have repeatedly assured the committee that no Americans were being sent into combat in Nicaragua.

"I think it is legitimate to ask some questions to make sure they are telling the truth," Leahy said. "I want to make sure that there was not any connection, either formal or informal."

Talavera's protest letter to Shultz said: "The widespread use of aircraft supplied by the Central Intelligence Agency to mercenary groups represents a new high in the intensification of the overt war being waged by the United States government against my country."

"With these actions, the policy of state terrorism pursued by the United States government has added new civilian victims to the hundreds of Nicaraguans murdered as a result of the war of aggression waged by the United States government against Nicaragua."

Dana Herbert Parker Jr., a Huntsville, Ala., police officer on leave, and James Powell 3d, of Memphis, Tenn., were killed Saturday when a helicopter crashed during a flight inside Nicaragua from a base in Honduras, the State Department said.

Department spokesman John Hughes has said Parker and Powell

had no connection with the U.S. government.

Nicaraguan officials in Managua said maps recovered from the crash site indicated that the helicopter flew into Nicaragua from Jamastran or El Aguacate, Honduras. El Aguacate is the site of a major U.S. airstrip; the Reagan administration requested funds from Congress last year to improve a dirt airstrip at Jamastran. Spokesmen for anti-government rebels denied the aircraft flew from Jamastran.

Leahy said that if Americans were being allowed to launch combat operations into Nicaragua from U.S.-controlled bases in Honduras, the action would be contrary to assurances given to Congress.

He said he would seek to determine whether the CIA or some other U.S. government agency was assisting Americans to go into combat in Nicaragua.

Parker and Powell, both 36, were members of a group called Civilian Military Assistance, described by its leader, Tommy Posey of Huntsville, as a volunteer organization operating on funds provided by its members to help supply food, clothing and other supplies to rebels fighting the leftist government in Nicaragua.

In Managua, Nicaragua said it would arrange to return to the United States the bodies of the Americans, the official newspaper Barricada said yesterday.